DELPHINE.

973

BY

Serfojee Rajah

MADAME DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN.

Un Homme doit savoir braver l'Opinion ! une Femme s'y soumettre.

A Man ought to be able to brave public Opinion ; a Woman should submit to it. *Madame Neckar's Miscellanies.*

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LETTER I.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, Dec. 4, 1792.

THE perfidy of men has separated us, my Delphine, but let love reunite us! let us efface the past from our memories! what are external circumstances to us? Do you not see all the objects which surround us as through a cloud? Do you feel their reality? I believe in nothing but in you. I have a confused knowledge that I have been shamefully deceived; that I have reproached a dying woman with the deception; that her daughter says she is my wife:— I know it; but one single image stands forward

forward amid the obscurity and uncertainty of my recollection:—it is you Delphine: I see you at the foot of this bed of death, endeavouring to restrain my rage; fixing your eyes on me with a look of mildness and of love. I wish again to meet that look. It is that alone can calm the feverish agitation which prevents me from recovering my strength.

Did not my excellent friend Barton tell me yesterday that it was your intention to depart, and to depart without seeing me! I did not believe him; for what pleasure could your gentle nature feel in compelling me to follow your steps like a person deprived of his reason? You have not imagined, you could not possibly entertain the idea, that I could resign myself to the idea of living without you. No: because an atrocious combination has prevented me from being your husband, I will not consent to see you one day, or one hour less frequently than if we had been united to each other. We are united—all is falshood in my other connection—nothing

is

is truth but my love—but your's; for you love me. Delphine, I conjure you, tell me on the day, the day on which I contracted this marriage, which can exist only in the eyes of the world: this marriage, of which all the oaths are null and void, since they all supposed that you had ceased to love me: were you not behind a pillar, a witness to this fatal ceremony? I then believed that my imagination alone had created this illusion; but if it be true that it was really you whom I saw, why did you not throw yourself into my arms? Why did you not claim your lover in the face of heaven? Oh! I should have recognized your voice; it would have convinced me of your innocence; and before that same altar, placing your hand upon my heart, I should have sworn to you that love which I can feel for you alone!

But what imports this ceremony? It is nugatory, since it is to Matilda that it has united me. Delphine, whose superior mind emancipates itself at the dictates of

of reason from the opinion of the world, will not reject love from a timid respect for the judgment of mankind. Your true duty is to love me. Was I not your first choice? Am I not the only being for whom your celestial soul felt that durable and profound affection on which the fate of your life must depend. Oh! my dearest, though no person can see you without admiring you, I alone can enjoy with delight every word you utter; I alone lose not the slightest of your glances. Suffer me to adore you in all the gradations of your charms: love me that you may be elated with yourself; for I will teach you all your worth: I will discover to you virtues, qualities, seductive graces, which you possess, without knowing that they adorn you.

Oh, Delphine, the laws of society were formed for the mass of mankind; but when a love without example preys on the heart, when a perfidy almost equally rare has separated two persons who had chosen each other, who had loved each other, who had

had promised themselves to each other; can you suppose that these laws, calculated for the ordinary circumstances of life, ought to bind such sentiments. If before the legal tribunals, I could prove that it was by the most infamous artifice that my consent was extorted, would they not determine that my marriage ought to be annulled? And because I have only moral proofs to alledge; because the honor of the world does not permit me to assign them, may I not pronounce in my conscience the judgment which the laws would confirm were I to appeal to them? May I, from the bottom of my heart, not declare myself free.

Alas! I know it well: I am not permitted to give you my name; to glory in my love in presence of the world; to defend and protect you as your husband. You must renounce for me those advantages which I cannot promise you, and which so many would gladly lay at your feet. But I am certain you would readily make

make to me this sacrifice; you would not wish to punish an unhappy wretch for the mean perfidy of which he has been the victim. Ah! when this miserable being reproaches himself with having too easily believed calumny, when he execrates his conduct in despair; when he is on the point of detesting himself, then, Delphine, then especially must you feel the necessity of consoling that friend who can find no repose in his own heart. Yes, I hate, by turns, the authors of my miseries and myself. My agonizing thoughts hurry me incessantly from indignation against the conduct of others, to indignation against my own errors.

I wish to conceal nothing from you, Delphine; by enumerating all the sacrifices I require from you, I shall not terrify your generous heart. Our union, however careful I may be to treat with honor and respect her whom I adore, will be more prejudicial to your reputation than to mine. Will this fear prevent you? I have less right than any other to condemn

it.

it. But hear me, Delphine, whether reaſonable or puerile, whether noble or feeble motives part you from me, is of no consequence to me. I will never survive our separation. Now you know this, it belongs to you to judge what is the power of your will. Has it sufficient strength to support you against your regret and grief for my death? Delphine, are you certain that you have this strength! Beware—I do not believe that you have.

Had I not seen you till after my destiny had united me to Matilda, I ought, perhaps I might have been able, to have resisted love. But to have known you when I was free, to have been the object of your choice, and then to be bound to another; this is a crime that ought to be punished, and I will make myself the victim, if you resolve that the dreadful consequences of my fault must be such, that my heart must be for ever tormented by repentance.

How! my happiness shall be torn from me, not by necessity, not by chance, but by a voluntary act, by an irreparable act! Let those who can bear that word *irreparable*, continue to live. As for me I believe it came from hell: it belongs not to the language of men; their imagination cannot endure it. It announces an eternity of punishment; it expresses in itself the most intolerable tortures.

Amid all the natural violence of my character, I never had an idea of the misery which seized me, when I feared that I might lose you; and lose you by the effect of my own resolutions, of the sentiments to which I had yielded; of the words which I had pronounced. Delphine, in expressing this fear, which pursues me without intermission, I have been obliged to interrupt myself. I had relapsed into that fit of rage in which you saw me when I accused, without pity, Madame de Vernon: to calm my feelings, I repeated to myself that you would not brave

brave my despair. O, my Delphine, I shall see you again; I shall see you as soon as possible.

I am assured that to-morrow I shall be well enough to go out. I will then come to you: can it be possible that your door should be shut against me? But whence this fear? Do I not know your generous heart? your mind eminently endowed with courage and independence. What motive can prevent you from having pity on an unfortunate wretch who is dear to you, and who can no longer live without you.

LETTER II.

ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

WHAT motive can prevent me from seeing you? Personal or timid sentiments, Leonce, have no power over me. Heaven is my judge

judge that I would give up all the possible advantages of intereſt for one hour, one single hour which I might be permitted to pass with you without remorse; but what gives me strength to disdain all appearances, and raise myself even above public opinion, is the certainty that I have done no wrong: I do not fear men while my conscience reproaches me with nothing. They would indeed make me tremble had I lost that support.

We are very unfortunate: O Leonce! can you believe that I do not feel this? A few months since every thing seemed to unite to assure to us the most perfect felicity. I was free; my situation and my perfect fortune secured to me perfect independence: I saw you; I loved you with all the feelings of my heart, when a fatal blow, which the slightest circumstance, which a single word might have warded off, separated us for ever! O, my friend! reproach yourself more for what has happened: it was

destiny

destiny alone that has rendered us both wretched.

Do you not think that I ought also to accuse myself as the cause of my own misfortune? Frequently I accuse this irrevocable destiny. I view the past, as if it were still future. I bitterly repent that I did not go to seek you when I had resolved it a hundred times. Despair seizes me when I recollect this pride, this miserable weakness, which bittered my actions, when my heart inspired me with freedom and courage.

If it can assuage your pains which you suffer, Leonce, to reflect whenever it may be, that at that same instant, Delphine your poor friend, overwhelmed with her misfortunes, implores heaven for aid to support them, heaven, which before had always granted her succour, but which now she implores in vain; if this idea, at once painful and consoling, can mitigate your sufferings, you may resign yourself to it. But what are your griefs to our duties?

ties? Does not virtue, which we adored in the days of our prosperity still remain the same? Ought she to have less power over us, because the moment of fulfilling what we admired is arrived?

Fate has not willed that the most pure enjoyments of moral feeling and sentiment should be granted to us. Perhaps, my friend, Providence has judged us worthy of performing the most noble act that can be exhibited to the world—the sacrifice of love to virtue. Perhaps, alas! I have need, in order to support myself, to revolve in my mind every thing that can raise my enthusiasm; and I feel, with grief, that for you, for you alone, Leonce, I experience those sallies of the soul, with which I was heretofore inſpired by the generous love of virtue.

It is yet in our power to govern our actions, our happiness is no longer in our power. Let us resign it to the care of heaven, which, after many exertions, will bestow on us tranquillity;—Yes, tranquillity

lity at last. What a futurity is before us! Long sufferings, and the repose of the dead for our only hope. Yet must we, Leonce, either disavow the noble principles of which we were so proud, or resign ourselves the victims of what they require of us.

You will easily perceive by this letter, what conflicts I undergo! If you longer entertain a hope, you deceive yourself. I know that the duties I loved, no longer have any charms in my eyes; that love has discoloured all the other sentiments of my life, that I must struggle every moment against the affections of my heart, which forcibly draw me towards you. I know it, and I consent to declare it to you; but this is only because I have resolved never more to see you. Shall I tell you the secret of my weakness: determined as I am on the greatest, the most painful, the most heroic of sacrifices, I may be permitted to believe myself released from every other effort.

I will

I will follow the plan which I had formed before your return from Spain. What a change has taken place since that return! I have seen you, and a new obstacle opposes my departure. To see you is the greatest of dangers; and against this only danger, this only happiness, I must summon up all my resolution. Be not angry at this determination: think what it must have cost me. Have pity on me; and let all your love become pity.

I endeavour to strengthen my soul to execute my resolution; but do you know how I now pass my life?—I do not suffer myself to be at leisure an instant, that I may stifle, if possible, the emotions of my heart. I invent a multitude of useless occupations to suspend the activity of my thoughts. Sometimes I walk in my garden with hasty steps, to procure sleep by fatigue; sometimes despairing thus to procure it, I take opium to force a slumber of a few hours. I fear to be alone during the night, which leaves to

grief

grief all its power, and enfeebles reason alone.

I should already have set out, had you not declared that you will follow me. I enjoin you to give me your word that you will not. How would you be exposed by such an act? How much would you wrong your wife, whose happiness, for many reasons, I ought ever to hold sacred? And what would you gain, should you persist in this mad resolution? In the midst of the road, on some spot rendered rigid by the frosts of winter, I should see you again, and die with grief at your feet, if I should not find in myself strength sufficient to fulfil my duty by leaving you for ever.

Leonce, there are in destiny, events, which cannot be avoided, and to struggle against their power, can only sink us deeper in the abyss of misfortune. Let us merit by our virtues, the protection of a benevolent Deity to carry this resolution into effect. We can do nothing for ourselves with success

cess. Let us enter on a devoted life, a life of sacrifices and of duties, it has almost always bestowed happiness on virtuous souls. Look at Madame d'Ervins, the victim of love and repentance. She is about to shut herself up in a convent for ever. She has refused the hand of her lover; she renounces supreme felicity, though this felicity would have cost no person a tear.

It is I who resist your prayers; and it is I, nevertheless, who must bear in my heart a sentiment which nothing can efface. When I saw myself despised and even insulted by you, I loved you. I endeavoured to find in myself faults which might excuse your injustice. Ah! forget me not! Is there any duty which commands you to forget me? Should such a duty exist, let it be disobeyed. Were I to feel myself a second time abandoned by your affection; were I doomed again to enter the gloomy solitude of life, I could not support it.

Leonce, let us establish between us certain relations which may be for ever dear

to

to us. Every year, on the second of December, the day on which you ceased to believe me culpable, go into that church in which I saw you, for I cannot resolve to deny it, into that church in which I saw you give your hand to Matilda. Think on me, in that place, leaning against the pillar, behind which I heard the oath which must cause me an eternal suffering. Alas! why were not my exclamations heard? I should only have braved men; and now I must brave the Deity himself, in yielding to see you.

Leonce, until this day, I can present to the Supreme Being a life without blemish. If you wish not that I should preserve this treasure, pronounce that I have lived long enough. I will receive the order from your hand with joy. When I feel the approach of death, I shall still enjoy a moment of happiness equal to all that awaits me. I will permit myself to call you to me, to tell you that I love you. Do you wish this? Tell me you do, this wish

would

would not be cruel: is it not sufficient that my heart, the judge of yours, is grateful to you for it?

I love myself while I write to you: I I am no longer mistress of my thoughts or words; I must forbid myself even this last pleasure. Adieu.

LETTER III.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

YOU will depart without seeing me! you will! the earth shall fail beneath my steps, before I cease to follow you. Can you believe that you may escape my love! it will vanquish all things, and even your resolves. Respect a passionate affection— I repeat, respect it. You know not what evils you will draw on yourself by braving it.

I have

I have been this morning at your door, though still so weak I am scarcely able to support myself, and was refused admittance. I walked for some time in your court-yard for your servants would not permit me to enter the house. Madame d' Artenas was with you. I did not wish to cause an alarm. I raised my eyes towards your apartment, and thought I could perceive your elegant form behind a curtain. But even the shadow of you at length disappeared, and your waiting-woman came to bring me your letter, requesting me, on your part, to read it before I asked to see you. I obeyed: I know not what disturbance of mind overpowered me. If you leave your residence, if you depart without my knowledge, if I know not whither you are gone! no, you will not condemn your unhappy lover to seek you in vain in every place, incessantly thinking that he sees you, yet incessantly losing you, and hurrying with vain efforts ofter your image, as in those dreadful dreams

dreams which cannot be prolonged without causing death.

Delphine, you who have never been able to support the spectacle of suffering; am I then to be made the only exception to your compassionate goodness? And because I love you, because you likewise love me? To my grief nothing? Do you not consider it as your duty to console me? Oh! what had I done to men? What had I done to that perfidious woman who gave me her daughter, when I ought to have dedicated my destiny to you? And you who ask me to pardon, by what right do you ask it if you are more inflexible towards me than you have been towards my persecutors?

You refuse to hear me, yet you know not what I have to say to you, and what it is necessary that I should say to you: O Delphine never have I been able to speak to you from the bottom of my heart: a thousand circumstances have prevented us from seeing each other without restraint.

Might

Might it be granted me to converse with you once, once only, without interruption, without counting the hours, I feel that I should persuade you; you would be convinced that nothing similar to our situation has ever existed: that we have chosen each other when we had power to chuse, when we were at liberty to dispose of ourselves. It was necessary to deceive us to disunite us. Our souls have entered into no voluntary engagement. Before your God we are free. O Delphine! you who revere, who inspire others with the love of eternal Providence; can you believe that it has given me, the sentiments I feel only to condemn me to vanquish them? When nature shudders at the approach of pain, nature warns man to avoid it: and shall her instinct be less powerful with respect to the pains of the soul. If mine is goaded by despair at the thought of losing you, ought I to resign myself to that idea without a struggle? No, Delphine, no, I know not what the most rigid mora-

lists have required of man; but when an unknown power, places in my heart the devouring necessity of seeing you again, that power, by whatever name it may be called, imperiously forbids that I should separate myself from you.

I am ready solemnly to promise, that when I shall have seen you, I will leave it to you to determine on our fate; but I must express to you the sentiments by which I am oppressed. By day, by night, I speak to you; I seem to myself to shew to you in my sentiments, in our situation, truths of which you were ignorant, and which I alone could teach you. When I write to you I no longer recollect what had passed in my mind; I cannot likewise; I cannot communicate in my letters that accent which heaven has given us to convince; and if it be true, that could I speak to you, you would consent to pass your days with me, think Delphine to what a condition you reduce me by condemning

me without suffering me to plead before you for my life.

You have assumed so peremptory a resolution against my misery, that you must believe yourself certain that you shall refuse me, after having heard me. Why then will you not for a moment afford me the consolation of making this vain attempt, over which your firmness will triumph? Delphine, if we must part, if we absolutely must, would you wish to leave in my heart a harsh sentiment against you? Angel of goodness, would you wish it? You did not refuse your attention, your celestial consolations to Madame de Vernon; to her who separated us; and can you believe, Delphine, that I am so far from death, that at least a farewell is not my due.

You saw the violence of my character, on that fatal day, on which, had it not been for you, I should have shewn myself still more implacable. Think how acute must be my feelings now that I am

shut

shut up in my house with a woman who has taken your place! O Delphine! I am only fifty paces from you, yet I cannot obtain a sight of you. I send ten times a day to be assured that you have not yet ordered the preparations for your departure. I tremble like a child at every noise. I construe the most simple events into presages. Every thing seems to announce to me that I shall see you no more. You speak of your grief, Delphine; but your mild soul has never experienced any impressions which it could not govern. The grief of a man is violent and fierce: strength cannot long struggle without triumphing or perishing.

How can you endure that I should remain in this wretched condition, and refuse a word that would put an end to it, as if by enchantment? I no longer know you. You suffer your ideas of virtue to change your character. Beware! you will render it harsh and unfeeling; you will lose that perfect goodness, the true

impress

impress of the divine nature. If you can become insensible to what I feel, what grief, what suffering can ever move your compassion. It is sensibility which diffuses over your charms that celestial expression. What an exchange will you make, if by fulfilling what you term your duties, you lose the generous warmth of your soul, and stifle all those involuntary emotions with which your virtues and your love inspire you!

Endeavour not by vain subtleties to distinguish between your conscience and your heart. Ask that heart; does it reject the idea of seeing me as it repels that of a vile or cruel act? No; it draws you towards me. It is your god, it is nature, it is your lover, who speaks to you: listen to one of these the protecting powers of your destiny. It is in your inmost heart that they exercise their empire. Let us forget every thing that is not us; our souls are sufficient to us. Let us in thought annihilate the whole universe, and be happy!

Happy!—Do you know what all happiness? It is an hour, a single nour of conversation with you, and you refuse it me! I restrain myself; I conceal from you what I feel at this idea; it is not by terrifying your heart that I wish to make an impression on it; let tenderness alone excite in it emotion! Delphine, a single hour! and after that you may—if you can still entertain the cruel intention.—Yes, after that you may—separate yourself from me.

LETTER IV.

ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

IF I see you again Leonce, never shall I have sufficient strenght of mind to endure the pangs of separation. Could I deny you this parting interview; could I

deny it in opposition to my most ardent wishes, if I were not firmly convinced that to see you and to leave you is impossible. Why do you speak of virtue and inflexibility? It is you who ought to complain of my weakness, and leave me to submit to the sacrifice which alone can restore me to my own esteem. Whatever it may cost me to describe what is the strength of my feelings, it is now proper to disclose to you the extent of your dominion over me. You will then yourself admit, that it was my duty to quit my house to be beyond the reach of your influence.

You had written to me that it was your intention to visit me this morning, and I have had sufficient command over myself to give orders that you should not be admitted. I have spent a considerable part of the night in writing to you, and I wish to be alone all the day. I determined after I had prohibited your presence to suffer no one to approach me. Madame d'Artenas gained admission to my house, but, under

the pretence that I was busy, I left her to peruse in my library a book which interested her, while I remained in my chamber. I stood behind my window curtains with my eyes fixed on the entrance to the house, and holding in my hand the letter that I had written to you; and which I hoped, at least, would have the effect of softening the severity of my refusal.

In this situation I continued almost an hour, in a state of anxiety which would probably affect you, if your resentment against me could be softened.

As long as I heard no noise I confirmed myself in the resolution which duty imposed upon he; but when the door opened I felt my heart sink within me, and I experienced the desire of once more returning to him, whom I had determined to renounce for ever, again resuming its power. At length you make your appearance, and you advance a few paces to the domestic who was to inform you that I could not receive

your

your visit. Your gait was marked with the traces of recent illness; your features appeared to me altered; but still I confess to you, that never did I discover in the expression of your countenance, a seductive charm which more forcibly penetrated my heart. You changed colour at the reiterated denial of my domestic; you seemed to me to hesitate, and at that moment you triumphed over all my resolutions. I rushed out of my chamber to run to you, to throw myself at your feet before all present, and to ask pardon of you for ever dreaming of opposition to your will. I felt a generous transport; it appeared to me that I was going to devote myself to virtue, by yielding to my passion for you. I was overwhelmed with that pity inspired by love, which is the most irresistable emotion of the soul. Every other idea disappeared.

I met Madame d'Artenas as I descended the stairs in this transport of enthusiasm. Good God! said she, what are

you about? At this question I blushed extremely for my conduct. I am going to send off a letter, said I—and supported by her presence, and by the reflections which had sprung up in a moment in my mind, I gave orders to a servant to deliver you my letter, and to request of you to return to your own house to read it.

It was at this moment that I felt how much greater the danger of your presence was, than I had ever apprehended! Never had your presence before produced in me such agitation. I trembled, I grew pale, and if I had heard your voice; if you had spoken to me, I should have been totally incapable of supporting myself. The appearance of a supernatural being, affecting the heart at once with enchantment and terror, would not have so forcibly conveyed the idea of what were my feelings, when your eyes were raised to the window, as if to implore a mitigation of my cruelty; when before my house, so long unfrequented, I beheld him whose absence I had so long deplored.

deplored. Leonce! I have quitted that house which you have rendered for ever dear to me. I quitted it at the moment when it became indispensable. If you had returned all would have been over; I could not have departed. After this declaration, which I cannot make without feeling a certain degree of self-condemnation, will you still harbour resentment against me? Shall I inspire you with the bitter feelings with which you have threatened me? Will you not at length permit me to go into Languedoc? I am concealed in a place where you cannot possibly discover me, and I only wait to set out on my journey for your promise that you will not pursue me. Leonce—sacrificing, as I do, my destiny to the happiness of Matilda, do you wish that any terrible disaster should poison her enjoyments without uniting me to you?

Yes, Leonce—your duty and mine requires of us not to render Matilda unhappy. Morality, which in all cases forbibs

us rendering others miserable, ought to triumph over all the doubts of reason, and all the weaknesses of the heart. The more I suffer myself, the more am I afraid of giving others pain; and my sympathy for the sufferings of others increases with the magnitude of my own misfortunes. Do not avail yourself of this sentiment, Leonce, to reproach me with your sorrows; your sufferings, Leonce, are mine. I cannot so far deceive my conscience as to persuade myself, that kindness, the most affectionate, does not command me to afflict you; it is to my passions I ought to yield, for the purpose of consoling you. Nothing shall I ever do for you which is not inspired by love.

Leonce—why should I conceal it from you; after the confession I have made, it would be in vain to attempt concealment. If in my acquaintance with you I had compromised no one but myself; if I had only destroyed my reputation, and that inward satisfaction which at once constituted my

my happiness and my glory, I should have given up my lot to all the misfortunes attendant on a criminal sentiment; I would have renounced all that *fierté* which was so conspicuous in my character before I knew you; I would, regardless of the consequences, return to you, and the happiness of seeing you would have upheld me in life, or supported me even amidst the horrors of dissolution. But the fate of another is involved, and even love itself shall not triumph in my heart over the bitter remorse which would prey on me, if I were capable of sacrificing Matilda to my happiness. To her dying mother I promised to protect her, and however criminal the unhappy Sophia was, this promise was consoling to her spirit in her departing moments. Who is it that can absolve those guilty of crimes to the dead? What voice is there that would pronounce their pardon?

Matilda herself—was she not the companion of my infancy? Am I not bound

 to

to protect her by the ties of blood? Shall I tear her from you who are her natural protector? At the age of eighteen shall I blast all her future prospects of felicity? No, Leonce; bestow on Matilda all that is requisite to her happiness; your time, and those little attentions which sweeten domestic life. She is ignorant of your attachment to me; she may remain ignorant of it for ever. This idea will, I trust, calm my spirit in those moments of despair, of which at all times I cannot ward off the approach. Leonce—you will one day be happy in the indulgence of domestic affections; you will not forget, that, to secure to you the happiness arising from these domestic ties, I have given up all, and you will mingle a tender recollection of me with your purest enjoyments!

LETTER V.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

YOU have quitted your house; you have quitted it in order to avoid me. I am unable to trace your steps. Every where like a person deprived of his senses I search, where there seems any hope of your being found. No; it cannot be virtue, which can suggest such conduct; it can only be the effect of insensibility. Of what advantage will it be to me to paint to you my griefs? You have done all in your power to drive me to despair. In the mean time summon up all the fortitude you possess, for I will now put it to the severest trial, and if there is any thing of goodness, or of tenderness in your nature, your resolution will cost you dear. I have been at Bellerive, at Cervay at the

house of Mad. de Lebensei. She protested to me with an air of the greatest sincerity, that she was ignorant where you were at this time. I returned and discovered your valet de Chambre Anthony. Shall I disclose to you what I have done to be put in possession of your secret? I believe that he knows it, for he almost promised to get this letter conveyed to you to-morrow, but nothing could induce him to violate his fidelity. During the remainder of the day, I walked wrapped up in my great coat up and down your street, or in the streets adjoining to it. My object was to watch the steps of Anthony. Unhappy wretch that I am! induced to employ means of the most disgraceful kind, to obtain from you, who pretend to love me, a favor which you ought not to refuse to the basest of mankind.

Every time I perceived a female at a distance, who could create a momentary illusion, I approached with an air the most mournful, till I discovered that she was

unworthy of attracting my attention, even for a moment.

I experienced a feeling of misanthrophy against every creature who passed me, who had the appearance of being active in the pursuit of his private affairs, who passed by me without particular observation, without noticing my misery.

In the evening, no longer afraid of being recognized, I rested myself on a bench near your door, where I was exposed to the snow which fell yesterday; but even the mournful pleasure of abandoning myself to my reflections, was not granted me. I listened to, and observed with the profoundest attention, whatever passed near your house. I got up every moment, imagining that I saw Anthony, who, anxiously avoided me: but when I had proceeded a few steps, I hastily returned, thinking that it was on the opposite side I was most likely to find what I was so eagerly wishing to discover. The hours rolled on, but I continued alone in the streets; every

moment

moment it become more improbable, that in the middle of the night I should collect any intelligence, but as often as I had resolved to depart, I was seized with so lively a desire of remaining on the spot, that I considered it as a sort of presentment, and though twenty times deceived, I yielded to the agitation of my heart, as to an intimation from the world of spirits. At length the day dawned. For the purpose of writing to you, I have employed a room facing your house. At this moment I am leaning on the window which commands a prospect of your gate, and my eyes cannot for two moments together be fixed on the paper. If I pass other twenty-four hours in this situation, I shall hate you—Yes the Angels would be hateful if they condemned mortals to the woes which you have doomed me to suffer. This punishment effects a total change in my character, in my love, nay, even in my morality itself. If you prolong this situation, do you reflect who will be the greatest

sufferer

sufferer by my misery? Matilda: yes it will be Matilda to whom you sacrifice me. I would have continued my attentions to her, if you had still continued to love me; if you had still suffered me to behold you. But I detest in her the sacrifice which you make to her of my destiny. I regard her as the idol before whom you have determined to sacrifice me, and at least I have the consolation of thinking that your virtues, obstinate as they are imprudent, will only injure the fate of us all.

If you conceal from me where you are; if you continue to refuse to see me, my resolution is taken, and you know that I am capable of any degree of firmness. I will reveal to Matilda by what a series of falshoods our marriage was accomplished; and after telling her that in my heart I regard it as null, I will give up to her the half of my fortune. She will continue to retain my name, and I will see her no more. I will pass the remainder of my life with

my

my mother in Spain, and she to whom you have thought it proper to devote me will never again hear of me till my death. What signifies to me what the world says on the score of duty. Do not torments destroy the obligation of these duties. When a fever has seized an individual, no duty is exacted of him. He is left to struggle against pain, and all the ordinary relations of life are suspended. Have I not also my fits of delirium? Can any thing at these times be expected from me? One idea, one sensation, engrosses my whole soul. Speak to me only of seeing you again, and I will listen to you with eagerness; your virtues will again resume their empire over my heart. But dprive me of this hope, and who shall make me renounce the projects I have formed? No one can ever effect so important a change in my feelings; and you above all, my Delphine, why do you offer me your counsel to alleviate that misery which you yourself create? It is the last degree of insult to

act

act at first the part of an assassin, and then to offer to heal up the wounds which cruelty had inflicted.

Every thing is now fixed: I will inform Matilda, by letter, of the circumstances of our marriage, of my attachment to you, and of the determination I have formed to live apart from her. In twenty-four hours she shall know all if you do not write me that your resolutions are changed, or even if you return no answer to this letter. What my letter will contain, I have informed you, and my determination is irrevocable. If the words I pronounce are bitter, you know who has dictated them, and if I plant daggers in the heart of Matilda, it is not my agitated hand that will be blamed, it will be the *sang froid*, it will be the despotic obsinacy which you display to render me incapable of all sober reflection.

LETTER

LETTER VI.

ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

YOU believed that you had alarmed me by your unworthy threat. Since I have known you, I have once only felt resentment against you, and that was after the perusal of your letter. For a few moments I was almost inclined to believe you capable of doing what you menaced, and I thought of you without emotion, for I had ceased to esteem you.

Leonce, this interval of cruel tranquillity lasted but for a moment: I blushed at the idea of believing you capable of an action the most cruel, and the most immoral, that ever was perpetrated by man. You, Leonce! you will condemn to the most cruel state of unprotected solitude, a woman, virtuous as is Matilda. She has but

but lost a mother, and you will deprive her of a husband; you will leave her, you say, your name and your fortune, that is to say, you will act in such a manner as to escape the reproaches of the world which judges so very differently of the duties of husbands, and of wives. But what, in reality, will you do for Matilda? Have you reflected on the misery of a woman with whom every connection of nature is broken? Do you know that by the dependence of our lot, and the weakness of our hearts, we are unfitted to proceed alone in the rugged journey of life? Matilda is very religious, but her reason requires a guide. If she possessed not a single affection upon earth, disappointment raising her devotion already superstitious, would carry it to a pitch of fanatical enthusiasm, the effects of which it is impossible to anticipate. Of what crime can you charge her that you have resolved to inflict on her so severe a punishment. Her mother esteemed her so much, that she would not even confide

confide to her those arts which had increased her own consideration in the world. Matilda saw and loved you. She knew that you was destined to be her husband, and she thought she was performing a duty when she gave herself up to the attachment which you had inspired. And I, just Heaven! I who know so well what anguish the loss of you must occasion! Shall I be the means of making Matilda suffer the most pungent of all griefs? For do not deceive yourself Leonce; if you were to be guilty of the action which you threaten, I myself would become your accuser, not because I had refused to see you, not for having endeavoured to triumph over my weakness, but for having permitted you to read the sentiments of that heart which ought to have closed for ever, the moment you were no longer master of yourself. I would accuse myself for having inspired a sentiment, which far from rendering the object of my attachment more virtuous, proved the destruction of

of his goodness. Leonce! is it thus that we are formed to love each other? Ought not this sentiment, which I believe will never be eradicated, to have a powerful influence in raising our souls to perfection. Oh! what is there in love without enthusiasm? And can enthusiasm exist, unless respect for moral ideas, in some degree, mixes with our sentiments of the object of affection? If I ceased to esteem your character, what Leonce, would you be to me? The most amiable and the most seductive of men; but it is not by these charms alone, that my heart has been subdued. What decided my fate was that your good qualities, nay even your very faults, appeared to me to belong to a soul full of nobleness and dignity. In all of them I recognized the passion of honor exaggerated, if that be possible, but inseparable in my opinion from genuine virtue. I believed that you set more value on your own approbation, than the opinions of the world. Never was a generous or feeling expression

expression employed before you, without exciting in your bosom a corresponding emotion. Never have you heard of a benevolent action, without speaking of it with that warmth and animation which characterize a superior mind. Do you wish then to renounce every thing in your character that gave birth to to my attachment?

At the moment when I am condemning myself to the most cruel sacrifice, which duty can exact, the idea which I had formed of your character, sustains and animates my resolution; I suffer to prove myself still more worthy of your esteem. Perhaps this motive has a still stranger dominion over me, than I had supposed. You would I know Leonce, sacrifice love and all its enjoyments to the opinion of the world, and what would you think of me, if God and my conscience had less power over my conduct, than a regard to public opinion has over yours. I have only a few struggles more to undergo to ensure

victory, I have to regulate my feelings, to escape the torments of remorse. If in spite of my sincerest efforts, you succeed in overcoming my resolution, nothing but endless sufferings will await us. My reputation will be blasted, and perhaps you will then love me less. Just Heaven! can any thing be imagined to equal my punishment. The sacrifices I should have made to your love, would degrade me even in your eyes. And how could it be ascertained, that an opportunity would be given of rekindling your affection by a desperate action, and of securing to my memory that pure and lively recollection which the censure of the world had sullied.

Numberless fears and reflections, Leonce, press on my mind, and struggle against the sentiment which attaches me to you. Ah! what pains do we but feel in tearing ourselves from our Supreme bliss. I am unable to explain to you the causes of that terror, which seizes me as often as I think of

of yielding to your wishes. It is the probation of Heaven which inspires me with this salutary dread. Perhaps the soul of a departed friend, makes a last effort to save me, and watches over my happiness, though my senses cannot recognize his countenance, or listen to his words.

Leonce, if I have ceased to speak to you of Matilda, about whom I was just now solely occupied, it is because I am no longer afraid of the project, which the agitation of a moment had suggested. I do not require your answer to be assured that you have renounced it for ever. I know not in what part of this letter, I at once perceived the certain conviction with which I was impressed, but this impression cannot deceive me. O Leonce! we are not yet for ever separated. My own emotions teach me what you feel. There remains in my heart an intelligence, a communication of an indescribable nature, which reveals to me all your thoughts.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

YES I will obey you; it is impossible for me to deny that you are in the right. I yield to the force of truth, since it is you who disclose it. Shall I not have the power of persuading you on my part.

It is impossible that you should conduct yourself with such cruelty towards me. If I shall succeed in convincing you that the most rigid virtue would permit, nay even command you to yield to my prayers. I know not if in the delirium of a fever, I had conceived the hope, that you would be the wife of my choice, that you pronounced the solemn vow, which was to unite us together; I know not whether, on that fatal day, if I had seized hold of your hand, you would have stretched it out to me, and that I could

have presented it to the benediction of Heaven; but now I can take honor and love to witness, that I now demand no other tie, but what is pure as your own heart! a tie without which I could neither exercise virtue, nor promote the happiness of any other being.

You order me to continue to live with Matilda. I will obey: but will not the spectacle of my despair, sooner or later triumph over every resolution? If your depriving me of the emulation of pleasing; if frequent conversation with you do not reanimate my drooping spirits; and do not give me the free exercise of the qualities and talents which from nature I probably possess, but which, without you, will never be called into exercise, what shall constitute my employment in life? In what single point of view shall I be distinguished from the lowest of mankind? How shall I ever enter on any glorious career, whatever be its nature? No interest, no spontaneous emotion, will point out to me a field of

exertion!

exertion! And far from acting under the influence of ambition, I will go through the duties of life like a ghost walking in the midst of animated beings.

Can I cultivate my mind when it has become incapable of regular thoughts? When it collects every idea with labour; when I cannot even form a conception, or perform an action without first obtaining a victory over my predominating feelings. What is the career which can be pursued, or what the reputation which can be acquired, by continual efforts? When nature inspires nothing but sorrow, what is there great or good which can be effected? A splendid reverse of fortune may give new fervor to a high-spirited character; but continual chagrin is the poison of every virtue and of every talent. The energies of the soul are entirely annihilated by the continued operation of sorrow.

You believe that I should be capable of performing my domestic duties, if you tear from me the enjoyments which I

wished to find in your friendship. But do you consider that these are constant and pleasing duties, the exercise of which requires a certain degree of calmness which a moderate share of happiness alone, can bestow. Yes, Delphine, to you I would owe this tranquillity. Your enchanting figure, often enflames and agitates my heart; but from the superiority of your underſtanding, and the delicacy of your wit, I taste the purest and most tranquil delights. When at Madame de Vernon's, I heard you talk of virtue and of reason; when I heard you analyse ideas the most profound, and explain relations the most delicate; I felt myself enlightened and instructed. I comprehend more clearly the end of my exiſtence, and I reflected with pleasure on the useful direction which I could give to my thoughts. Oh, Love! where thou inspirest and ennoblest the soul, when thou callest into action the power of genius and advancest the character of thy votaries to perfection; it

is

is then only that thy power is fully experienced. It is there that thy influence is exerted for the perfection of human happiness, and not the increase of human misery. Since I have ceased to see you, I have felt myself degraded. I no longer do any thing of myself. With melancholy I compare the sorrows that await me with those which may yet be in store. I strive to divert my uneasiness by turning my thoughts to a thousand insignificant objects: and I frequently think that death would be far preferable to an eternal struggle to fly from the sufferings of life.

Delphine, these are not the ordinary pains of an unhappy lover, those pains over which time, absence, and reason, may triumph. My soul feels at all times a constant want, too imperious to be controuled. Your countenance would not so far enchant me by its indiscribable charms. Youth would not so far render your interesting figure alluring, but that I should continue to retain for you sentiments at once the

the most tender and the most pure. Your expressions have such empire over me that after having listened to you I never can love another woman.

Ah! my friend, do you not perceive it as well as myself? The world has fatigued itself for ages with talking of love; but it is once only in many thousand chances that two beings are perfectly suited to each other in all the faculties of the heart, and understanding. They are never happy but when together, never animated but when conversing with each other. Nature has been unwilling to give them any thing but by halves; the very thought of the one is not completed but by that of the other.

If this is our situation, my Delphine, what absurd attempts would you make! you would return to me in a few years if I lived—if we live, you would return to me, being no longer able to struggle against the destiny of the heart; but then we shall have nothing left but minds depressed by

too

too long a period of misfortune. We shall no longer have strength to relieve ourselves, and to bear, without sinking under it, that mass of affliction which nature causes to press upon the close of life.

Delphine! Delphine! believe me, when I swear to you, that I will respect all the duties, all the virtues, which you enjoin me: after such an oath you have no right to refuse me. You speak of your weakness; you pretend to fear it. Ah! cruel woman! how much you deceive yourself. But at length you would say with truth, that I, the lover who adores you, will preserve you if your heart places its confidence in mine; I will respect your virtue your celestial delicacy, every thing which constitutes you an angel of angels! I am anxious that your image should remain, in every respect, the same as that which now fills my heart; and the slightest alteration in your qualities would inflict a pang which not all the enjoyments of love could compensate.

You protect Matilda; I will be particularly attentive to her happiness. You know her character, her mode of life, the nature of her mind; you know how easy it is to conceal from her what is passing in the world, and even immediately around her. I shall make her happier by the cares which I shall imagine I owe her, in compensation for the happiness which I shall enjoy without her. I shall make her happier by thus repairing the wrongs of which she may be ignorant than if broken-hearted, I should content to drag on for a still longer period, at a distance from you a life of despair. Delphine, every thing is provided for; I have answered every objection; your heart has no remaining defence; my innocent prayer cannot be refused.

Would you condemn me to repel a suspicion of which you give me a hint? You have a right to upbraid me with my faults, after the unfortunate situation into which they have precipitated me; but ought you

likewise

likewise to tell me that I would love you with less ardour were your reputation impaired, and that too by your very condescension for my happiness? My friend banish far from you those fears which are unworthy of both of us. Permit me to pass one hour a day with you; the happiness of that hour will shed its influence over all the rest of my life. I shall expect it; I shall retain the remembrance of it; and my blood as it circulates in my veins, will no longer occasion that burning pain which I now feel. I shall be able to think, act, do good to others, perform the duties of my life, and die lamented by you.

I set out to leave this letter at your gate. Hope reanimates my heart: if you have spoken truth, Delphine, if our hearts still sympathize, this hope is a new presage of your answer.

Eleven at Night.

I have reached your house, and I learn that you have set off.—set off! and I am not

not to be informed what road you have taken! what do they expect, who persist in preserving this barbarous silence? Do they imagine that there is a spot on the earth where I shall not find you? Should this letter reach you before I shall, prepare your heart—your heart, hard as it may be—to suffer considerable pain: for though I have reason to believe you will prove inflexible at present, yet there are fatal events, which you cannot witness without horror. Adieu, I rest no more until I have met death, or you.

LETTER VIII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Dec. 14, 1790.

I REMAIN my dear Louisa! This expression is, perhaps, very culpable, but if you forgive it, all that I have to say to you will tend only to justify my conduct.

You

You know what was my situation, when I forbade him to see me. I thought my sorrow the most culpable and the most dangerous affliction. Now, that I have resolved no longer to abandon him, I am calm, and have no more fears; all that I wished for was to see him, and to talk with him. I do not even entertain any other wish, now that I am assured of happiness. I am certain of passing in this manner all my youthful years, without having to combat even a single criminal emotion. I will be his friend; to him shall all the feelings of my heart be consecrated; but this union shall never inspire us, but with the noblest of virtues.

Louisa, in parting with him, I struggled against nature and moral duty. I wished to triumph over the horror which I felt at the idea of giving him pain. I must, therefore, have been incessantly agitated with the most heart-rending uncertainty. Unable to decide whether I was virtuous or criminal, barbarous or gene-

rous; every thing was confused in my mind. I think I now comprehend what my duties exact, and I will consult them. I may not, perhaps, be able to preserve what the world calls existence and reputation. But for what reward do you think I expose them to danger? for that of seing him, and of seeing him without remorse! Let my enemies devise at their pleasure, calumnies, persecutions, and pains; they can invent nothing which I shall not despise in the bosom of such happiness. Love, such as I feel, leaves me nothing to fear but guilt or death. The rest of the evils of life appear to me only like those distant and fleeting mists, which scarcely for an instant, fix our attention.

I must describe to you, my sister, the scene, at once terrible and pleasing, which decided my fate. Madam d'Artenas being a witness, contrary to my wishes, of my refusal to see my friend, and of the pain which I felt upon the occasion, became mistress of my secret, and conducted

me

me to her house, unknown to Leonce, for the purpose of concealing me from his enquiries. I was convinced from his letters, that I could never bring him to promise that he would not follow me. Fearing every moment, lest he should discover my retreat, I resolved to set off, and to take a circuitous route in order to regain the road to the South. The very evening on which I wrote to you, my resolution was taken and carried into execution. In this grand effort, I conceive that I was supported by the fever induced by solitude and grief. I was animated by a forced enthusiasm, and was so eager to accomplish my cruel sacrifice, that I seated myself in my carriage in a quarter of an hour after I had determined upon going. I left Anthony at Paris, in order to arrange my affairs, and taking with me my chamber-maid only, I set off in a condition, resembling much more the extravagance of delirium, than the triumph of reason.

The

The night was dark and extremely cold. I had my handkerchief about my head, and throwing myself back in the carriage, was conveyed along for three hours, without once changing my position. Stupified by the rapidity of my progress, I attended to no particular idea, but banished all as they arose in succession. Nevertheless, it was in vain, that in the midst of my agitation, I endeavoured to confound the recollections and regrets which presented themselves to my view; I succeeded in obscuring what was passing in my mind, but nothing could appease my sorrow. I should imagine that my state of mind, at that period, bore some resemblance to that of those unhappy criminals who have received sentence of death, and who not having force enough to look their fate in the face, endeavour to extinguish in their minds every power of reflection.

The frosty air, against which I had not sufficiently guarded myself, gave me, from time to time, some very painful sensations;

tions; and what I suffered in this respect was of some advantage to me. I sometimes stopped my mouth with my handkerchief, so as, for a moment, to deprive myself of the power of respiration, in order to banish by another species of pain, that reflection which I dreaded as a persecuting phantom. I know not what would have become of me, when, after my vain efforts to escape from my own thoughts, I should have begun to meditate in all its consequences, upon the fate to which I had doomed myself. But I had reached in my opinion, that extremity of misery, which calls down to our assistance the interposition of divine clemency.

An event, which, at least from its impression on my mind, I might term supernatural, suddenly changed my condition, and rescued me from the pangs of despair. I heard my postillions crying out.—*Why do you stop us? Who are you? Get out of the way, this instant, get out of the way.*—I at first imagined that some

robbers

robbers had taken advantage of the night, in order to attack us, and though you know me to be sufficiently timid, the idea almost gave me an emotion of satisfaction. It seemed to me, that God in pity for my sufferings, had sent death to my relief. I precipitately thrust out my head at the door of the carriage, eager to encounter whatever danger should deliver me from the impressions to which I was then a prey.

I could discern nothing, but heard a voice, which from the first moment it struck me, has never been effaced from my heart, pronouncing these words:—*Drive on, if you choose; crush me in pieces; but I will not go out of your way.*—Stop! exclaimed I, stop!—The postillions did not distinctly hear me, and I imagined that they were preparing to drive over the body of the person who had placed himself in their way. I made several efforts to open the door, but my hands were seized with so violent a tremor, that I

could

could not accomplish my purpose; and this tremor encreased with every moment, which it made me lose. I was convinced that if I did not get out, the postillions not comprehending my intentions, would attribute my cries to terror, and taking Leonce for an assassin, might instantly crush him under the horses feet, and the wheels of my carriage. No! never can language depict the pain which I then suffered! At length I darted out of the fatal door: Leonce, who had heard me speak, threw himself off his horse, and running towards me, received me in his arms.

God of justice! what more will you do for virtue? What rewards have you treasured up for in heaven, when, on earth, you have given us the blessing of love? I recovered him the very day that I doomed myself to quit him for ever. My heart was identified with his, at the moment when I expected to feel the carriage which conveyed me, rise up as it passed over his

body.

body. No—I should have no claim to sensibility or sincerity, if I had not that instant resolved to devote my life to him, whose presence has given me such delicious transports. Ah! who could plunge him a second time into despair, when accidentally rescued from it? Who could voluntarily precipitate himself into the abyss, and become again a prey to all those painful sensations that are suspended and effaced by the confidence which happiness so suddenly inspires? No—I dare affirm, that the human heart is not endowed with force enough to adopt such a resolution.

Leonce carried me a few steps in his arms, conceiving that I had fainted away, though I had not. I had retained the consciousness of existence, in order to enjoy that instant, marked, perhaps, by heaven as the extreme and highest degree of felicity, which it has destined me to receive. The first words which I spoke to Leonce, were to promise that I had renounced my project of departure. My departure was henceforth

henceforth impossible, and I did not wish to keep him in suspense for a moment, after my decision was taken. Ah! Louisa, what gratitude did he express to me! what a delicious sensation do we derive from the happiness of the object of our love! An indescribable terror, created by imagination, had disturbed and alarmed my mind for a fortnight before. Why then did I wish to separate myself from Leonce? Are there not sisters who pass their lives in affectionate intercourse with their brothers? Are there not men whose friendship honors and consoles the most respectable women? Why should I esteem myself so little as to suppose I am incapable of purifying all the sentiments of my heart, and of enjoying at once affection and virtue?

When Leonce found I was resolved not to separate from him, the most agreeable intercourse began to take place between us. He gave orders for every thing necessary to be done with a grace which charmed me. He placed my *femme-de-*

chambre

chambre in Antoine's cabriolet, which had joined us, and paid attention to every detail with the most amiable vivacity, as if he believed that he was regulating all the interests of my life.

After having placed me in my carriage, he testified, by a thousand delicate attentions, his anxiety respecting the shivering tremor I had experienced. He wrapped me in his cloak, opened and shut the windows several times, and used every endeavour to render me more comfortable. I observed in him the activity of happiness, and an impossibility of repressing his joy, which made me give way to a most enchanting reverie. I was silent because he spoke. I was calm because the expression of his sentiments was ardent. Oh! Louisa, nobody, no living being, knowing what this felicity is, would even renounce its enjoyment!

It was agreed between Leonce and me, that I should say on my return to Paris, that I had been seized with a fever on my

journey.

journey, and that the indisposition obliged me to come back. I listened to his projects for enabling us to see each other every day without giving the least uneasiness to Matilda. They were such as I would have chosen myself. He also frequently recurred to the means he would take to prevent any injury being done to my reputation. Leonce, replied I, henceforth do nothing for me which is not necessary for yourself; I am, at present, only a being, who living for him she loves, and existing only in the interest, and the glory of the object of her affection. While you continue to love me, you will do enough for my happiness: my self-love, my inclinations, and my desires are all swallowed up in my attachment to you. Do not then agitate either my conscience or my love, but decide on my life in every other respect as you please. I place myself with pride and with joy in absolute dependence on your will.

Oh,

Oh, Louisa! with what passion, with what transport did Leonce thank me! Your happy Delphine heard, during three hours, the most tender love depicted in the most eloquent language. Leonce, I am certain, never for a moment entertained the idea of an expression or look which could displease me. When the heart is good!—When it is pure!—When it is enthusiastic! it is happy!

When we reached home, I found the last letter which Leonce had written to me, and which I had not received. It seemed to me that it would have been sufficient to have changed my resolution; but how delightful was it to read this letter together! Leonce's expressions of sorrow made me still more enjoy his present happiness, and I took a pleasure in making him repeat the prayers he had addressed to me, in order that my heart might be touched with them a second time: but at last I perceived it was three in the morning. The moment

moment I spoke Leonce obeyed, and left me to return to his own house.

I had wanted rest for several months, but I slept soundly the remainder of this night. When I awoke, the beams of a beautiful winter sun enlightened my chamber: Phœbus had selected the finest of his rays to shed a lustre on my happiness. I spent a long time in prayer to God; there was nothing in my heart which I feared to disclose to him. After prayer I sat down to write to you; our sentiments have always been so similar, that I have reason to hope, my dear sister, you will not condemn me. How is it possible that I should be satisfied with my conduct, and that you should think it blameable? However, Louisa, do not delay to answer me.—Adieu!

LETTER IX.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

BE our future destiny what it may my love, we have to thank heaven for giving us life. Let your mind repose on the day which has just elapsed. It forms a luminous point in the period of our existance, to which we shall never fail to look back with joy, whatever be the situation in which fate may place us.

From my infancy a strong and habitual presentment has always impressed me with the persuation that I shall die a violent death. This morning the same idea recurred to me, combined with the most delightful feelings; but it had assumed a new character. The pressage no longer alarmed me; I wished not to discourage it; I now see life only in love; I am happy in

in reflecting that if I die in youth, by any of those events which menace a character such as mine, I shall perish in the ardour of my passion for you, and long before age can damp the feelings of my heart.

Tell me, Delphine, why the thought of death infuses a kind of charm into the transports of love? Do these transports bring us to the limits of existence? It is because we experience in ourselves emotions which are more powerful than the human organs—emotions which make the soul wish to break its bonds, to unite, to confound more intimately with the object itself? Ah! Delphine, how happy am I in being moved by the tenderest feelings of affection! my eyes constantly filled with tears, my plaintive voice, my slow and distracted pace, may give me, perhaps, the appearance of one of the weakest of beings. My character, however, has lost nothing of its force; but this extraordinary state is produced by an inexhaustible source of exquisite impressions, which

diffuse themselves over my whole soul. Yesterday the air oppressed my breast: this morning I breathe only love and happiness. Ah! how much do I now love life! Every movement, every thought which reminds me of existence, is a pleasure which I wish to prolong: I would arrest the progress of time as a benefactor.

Delphine, we shall one day be unhappy, for such is the will of fate; but we never shall have reason to complain. I have felt your heart beat against mine; your arms have enfolded me with all the warmth of affection. Those pains, those inquietudes, those doubts which inwardly oppress us, and secretly unhinge our best sentiments, all the moral infirmities of our nature have suddenly vanished from my mind. I am become free, generous, bold, eloquent. Were it at this moment required of me to astonish mankind by the most intrepid courage, or to move them by the most impassioned language, I am capable of the task. I am worthy to undertake it, and no

mortal

mortal being would equal your happy lover. By this enthusiasm of love, which you alone could inspire, I shall be able to avoid the intoxication your beauty would produce. But if at any time that effort should be difficult, remind me of my own confession, that yesterday my happiness was completed.

I shall visit you this evening, Delphine, I can see you without the least inconvenience. Every thing is arranged; every difficulty is removed; the slightest circumstances second my wishes. I am favoured by heaven on your account. You shall instruct me in your religion; that is a subject I have not yet considered; but as I am so happy, it is proper I should know where to offer up my gratitude! The devotion I render you is not sufficient; I must know to whom I am indebtedfor my life; by whom it was, and by whom it is preserved? What sacrifices can be required of me? What punishments imposed upon me? There are no longer any in the world! How shall I

discover any duties, the performance of which would he painful, or any actions for which I ought to be rewarded, when I am completely blest by your presence? Oh! Delphine—tranquillize me, if it be possible, respecting the excess of my passion, and its duration. Tell me, that heaven has permitted you to give me a destiny that was not intended for other men. I can hope for every thing; I can believe in every thing! What miracles would astonish me, when a moment has changed all nature to my eyes?

I possess this felicity, and death alone can terminate it. There will be no more of those terrible days on which I cannot behold you, my love. I am no longer capable of conceiving or enduring that evil. I have lost in a moment all power over my soul. Happiness is become my habit and my right. I must watch over myself with much more attention than during the continuance of my despair. I am happy, but my whole being has been convulsed, and the

appli-

palpitations of my heart are most rapid. My bosom is animated by a kind of tremulous life, which the slightest pain would instantly extinguish. Oh! Delphine—perfect happiness is too great for human nature. My brain is disturbed, and now that I possess every wish of my heart, I am in danger of being rendered wretched by superstition.

Adieu! Delphine, adieu! —in vain do I attempt to express all my feelings. Strong passions, possession, ardour, an intensity, the secret of which is only known to the soul, that surest indication of celestial sympathy, love will best explain to you what I feel.

LETTER X.

MADLLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, Dec. 20.

SINCE you are happy, my dear Delphine, I am convinced that you entertain no thought, no wish, which the most perfect virtue would not approve: But alas! you know not all the perils of your situation. Why am I compelled by the duties of friendship, to refuse to participate in the first expression of joy you have entrusted to me for these six months.

I do not ask you, that which can no longer be obtained. On perusing your impassioned letter, I am convinced that you are no longer capable of making the great sacrifice, for which you have so long courageously struggled; but at least reflect

reflect on the troubles that menace you, in order that a salutary fear may still, if possible, be for your guide.

You believe that Leonce will never ask you to renounce those principles of virtue, without which, such a soul as yours can know no happiness. I am convinced that at this moment his heart is satisfied by an unexpected benefit; but if you cannot bear to see him unhappy, do you not reflect that he may use his powerful influence in such a manner as to render it the torment of your life! you will triumph, I believe; but have you calculated the pain you must sustain in the contest?

Though you should succeed in directing the sentiments of Leonce in his relations with you, can you forget his character? At present, indeed, he does not recollect it himself, he is only alive to love; but do you not know that the defects which are interwoven with our nature, and connected with all the habits of our life, become always prominent, whenever any circum-

stances offend them: you say you abandon the care of your reputation, and that it will be sufficient for you to watch the rectitude of your conduct. If it should happen, as happen it certainly will, that you become suspected and blamed for your intimacy with Leonce, he will suffer himself greatly for the injury done you, and you will perhaps experience with regret, the return of his irritability on every thing relating to opinion.

In a word, can you flatter yourself, that with all your care, you will be able to prevent Matilda from discovering the passion with which you have inspired Leonce? Do you believe she would be happy on learning that she was indebted to you, even for the attentions of her husband, and that his conduct towards her, depended entirely on your will?

I repeat it, I would not give you that rigorous advice which would now be useless; but consider that in a state of happiness, it is easy to fortify one's reason. I re-

I require nothing from the unfortunate; it is enough for them to support life. But it is not so with you, Delphine. You enjoy at present a situation which enchants you. This is the moment, therefore, which must be embraced, in order to accustom you by reflection, to support a future situation, which, alas! is but too probable! It gives me pain to tell you so; but I have never seen a single example of happiness and virtue in that kind of intercourse which you propose. You may afford an example of virtue, but not of happiness. Circumstances which can be foreseen, and circumstances which cannot equally be anticipated, contribute to the dissolution of ties which are held too dear, and yet are not sufficiently secured. Society being entirely formed upon principles, incompatible with connections purely voluntary, it presses upon them with its utmost force, and eventually never fails to burst them asunder. The remainder of our years is then consumed by anticipa-

tion; there is no longer any relish for those common interests and simple pleasures, which enable us to glide gently down the stream which Providence has marked out to us in the current of life. We have known, we have experienced that animated existence which results from passioned feelings, and we are no longer accessible to the ordinary enjoyments of our being. Reason may supply us with strength to support misfortune, but reason can never create a single pleasure; and when love has preyed upon the heart, nothing short of a miracle can convert it into a source of gentle and tranquil enjoyment.

Oh! Delphine, poor Delphine, you sacrifice every thing to a few years, perhaps to a much shorter period! I entreat you to regard this place as an asylum. Do not renounce your intention of coming; add not imprudence and a blind security to all the feelings which already detain you in captivity. Repose yourself

for a moment, in the lap of happiness; but let it be for the purpose of recovering strength to proceed in the journey of life. Alas! your sufferings are not yet past; do not shake off the ties which sustained you; all these ties, which are much more frequently a support than a restraint you will find but too necessary. We have often agreed, my friend, in remarking that society, perhaps Providence itself, has granted to the female sex but one species of happiness,—*connubial love*; and when this is taken away, it is as impossible to repair the loss, as to regain youth, beauty, and life,—all of them the immediate gifts of nature, and dispensed by nature alone.

It is painful, I am well aware, to reflect that happiness is for ever fled; but it would be still more painful to deceive one's self as to this truth; and in particular situations hope is a great evil, as it tends to prevent that repose which would

result from necessity. Delphine, friendship should reserve its weaknesses for the moment of suffering, in the midst of prosperity it must assume a severer tone.

I have alluded only to the pains which immediately attach to the feeling in which you indulge; I have not allowed myself to fear, that you will become a prey to the greatest of all miseries—Remorse. Ah! you have already experienced the most affliction; yet you still know not the full extent of the sufferings of the heart; you would have learnt it, had you been deficient in the performance of your duties. As long as you respect them, my friend, the favor of heaven may yet protect us.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, Dec. 28.

YOU are happy, my Delphine, my heart should have nothing more to wish for. It is but a fortnight since I believed not even in the possibility of pain; I thought that it never more would find an entrance into my heart. Yet I am uneasy, and almost melancholy. I wished to conceal my situation; but I felt that I should violate that perfect intimacy which unites our souls, should I permit the slightest secret to lurk in my breast.

I conjure you, Delphine, not to misconstrue what I am going to say to you. It is not feelings repressed, though not subdued, which already disturb my repose:

 neither

neither is it jealousy which has taken possession of me:—how should such an idea enter my mind? My heart is guarded against its approach by my esteem, by my admiration of you. But I hate this public life in which you again appeared with so much splendor. When I call at your house, I meet with an endless succession of visitors. I am never sure of having a *tête-à-tête* with you for a single moment. Frequently the teazing loungers who think you as a charming creature, continue to talk with you for an hour, when prudence permits me no longer to remain.

Yesterday evening, for instance, I passed four hours with you, and yet, who could suppose it? During those four hours, I experienced nothing but the most painful emotions. Madame d'Artenas importuned you to sup with her; you thought proper to accept the invitation, in order, as you informed me, to prove by the cordiality with which you should be received in the bosom of the best society

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in Paris, that the impression made by the reports circulated to your injury, was entirely removed: for even you, Delphine, use every effort to captivate the opinion of the world, and you never fail of success. I followed you into this giddy vortex, and had I not been there, I should not have seen you for the whole day.

I arrived before you; you entered, and never did you look so charming! That black habit, over which hung your flaxen tresses, that crape which surrounded your waist, and set off the purest white, in short, the whole of your dress made you dazzle every eye. I heard whispers of admiration on every side, and I know not why I did not feel proud of your success. It seemed to me that you owed your eclat to the desire of pleasing the company, and not to your attachment for me alone. This impression was the first which I received on your entrance, and the remainder of the evening was

was but too much in unison with this painful feeling.

Never did you produce so much effect by your presence and your conversation! Never did you display a mind more amiable and more attractive! Three ranks of persons of both sexes formed a circle around you, in order to see and hear you. Jealousy and rivalship were for a moment suspended. The spectators, like courtiers, in their deportment to men in power, endeavoured to approach you, without attempting a comparison. Each was proud of completely comprehending all the magic of your eloquence, and for once, the feelings of self-love contended which should most admire you. As to me, I remained at some distance from you, without, however, losing a syllable of your conversation. I heard also the exclamations of delight, I had almost said of love, uttered by all those who surrounded you. Whilst your wit shone forth with greater freedom and brilliancy than ever, it was impossible for me

me to join in the conversation. You were full of gaiety, and I was pensive. Yet I also, Delphine; I also was happy. Why, then, was I so embarrassed, so melancholy? Explain to me the cause of this difference. Oh! if you were to discover, that it is because I love you a thousand times more than you love me!

Assuredly the life which is led in Paris cannot accord with love. The affection with which you have condescended to favor me, would be impaired amidst such a variety of impressions. Your heart, I am convinced, is too susceptible to be wearied by self-love from its real attachments. But on the other hand, do not the unexampled triumphs you obtain, the moment you make your appearance, give you some feelings of pleasure? These pleasures are not derived from me; on the contrary, it is these which would console you for my absence. I am proud of your beauty, your understanding, all your charms; yet they make me feel that deli-

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cate jealousy, which fastens upon no particular object, but attaches itself to the slightest variations in the workings of the heart. Those admirers who encircle you, seem, in my estimation, to separate us. Those praises which are lavished upon you, give so many others an occasion to mention your name, to talk of you, to pronounce flattering expressions—expressions which I myself have often addressed to you, and which I shall doubtless be forced to repeat.

Oh! my friend, since you are never to be wholly mine, since those charms which fascinate every eye, are never to be ceded to my love; you must forgive my irritability when others see you, hear you, and thus possess almost the same enjoyments as myself. Pardon me, my Delphine, I have committed blasphemy—you do love me—to whom then can I compare myself on the face of the earth? But I cannot enjoy my situation in the midst of the world. The observers who surround us give me unea-

uneasiness. I am never completely happy but when alone with you. In every other situation I am in pain, and I feel with additional bitterness the misery of not being your husband. You wish me to be happy. I therefore venture to supplicate your return to Bellerive. The season is still rough, but it is not true, that you will make no account of what might prove disagreeable to other females?

The duties which you enjoin me, with respect to Matilda, do not permit me to see you before seven in the evening. Till that hour you will be frequently alone, but you taste some pleasure in those solitary reflections which deepen every impression on the heart. I request that female who has atchieved more numerous conquests, and obtains more extensive homage than any other in France, to shut herself up in a country house, amidst the snows of winter. But this female is susceptible of love; she abandoned every thing in order to shun me, when impelled by an unjustifiable

justifiable delicacy; and will she not still more willingly abandon every thing, to satisfy my heart, which pants for love, solitude, rapture, all the enjoyments which the world ravishes from the soul, by deadening its sensibility? I detest the hours which are consumed by a life of indolence. During the last six months I have lost the habit of occupation. If agreeable to you, we will devote some portion of our time to reading together; I love his gentle mode of deceiving, if it be possible, the feelings which prey upon my heart.

Religious exercises, and the society of devotees, occupy almost every hour with Madame de Mondeville. She has never asked me to accompany her to the parties which meet at the Bishop of M.'s, and I even think that she would appear somewhat embarrassed in bringing me along with her. She never allows herself to go to the Theatre. She starts objections to three-fourths of the ladies with whom

we might be on terms of civility to visit. Hence, it very easily happens, that I daily become a greater stranger to her society. She loves me, and yet she feels none of the pangs of separation. When the rigorous principles of Popery take possession of a mind, not naturally endowed with much sensibility, they regulate every thing, decide upon every thing, and leave neither sufficient leisure, nor sufficient knowledge of the world, to become susceptible of jealousy. I shall, therefore, give greater pleasure than pain to Matilda, by leaving her at liberty to spend her evenings with persons of her own way of thinking; and provided I do not dine from home, she will be satisfied with my conduct.

Every day, therefore, as soon as it strikes six, I shall mount my horse to go to Bellerive. My life will not commence till that hour; I shall arrive at seven, and return at midnight. Though I might be permitted to sit to a later hour in the societies of Paris, I will be punctual to my

time,

time, in order to avoid giving Madame Mondeville any occasion of uneasiness. You perceive, Delphine, with what care I anticipate your generous fears. I shall enjoy life for four hours only, but during the rest of that day I shall have those four hours in perspective, and I shall drag my chain in order to reach them. Oh! my friend, do not oppose this project—I am enchanted with it. I began this letter in the utmost dejection, but in tracing out our plan of life, I have felt my heart revive. I carry you off from the world; I preserve you for myself alone; I do not even leave at your own disposal the moments which I shall pass without seeing you. I am a severe and tyrannical task-master, but I love you to such an excess of idolatry, that I can never find fault with you.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

Dec. 29, 1790.

LEONCE, the day after to-morrow, being the first day of the new year, I shall expect you at Bellerive. I love to celebrate with you one of the most interesting epochs of time. They will aid me, I hope, to view back the years of my happiness. All the solemnities which mark the course of life, give pleasure to him who is happy; but how bitter would be their return, if accompanied only with the remembrance of sorrows!

I was anxious, my friend, that my first expressions should convey my consent to your wishes; but now permit me to tell you,

you, that your letter has given me some pain. How many motives do you give me for the simplest wish? Do you think that I should feel repugnance in quitting the world? Have I any interest, any enjoyment, any object independent of you? What anxiety, what agitation do you, as it were, involuntarily, discover in what you have written to me? I had, a few hours before, received a letter from my sister-in-law, attempting to open my eyes to the dangers to which I am exposed; and already, in some of your ambiguous complaints, I thought I found a presage of the misfortunes with which she threatens me.

What! Leonce, a month has not yet elapsed, since from our absolute separation, a long interval of punishment, we have come to see each other every day; and already your heart is tormented, and conceals from me, perhaps, what it feels, but what it is not permitted to declare. Scarcely have I a sufficient command of my thoughts

thoughts and my feelings, in order to know and to relish the whole extent of my happiness; while you seem discontented, and complain of your fate. In those familiar conversations which you desire, you never cease to talk to me of your sacrifices. Oh! Leonce, Leonce, are the delights of sentiment exhausted with regard to you? Tell me not that your heart is more impassioned than mine; trust me, that in our situation, the happiest of the two possesses the greater share of sensibility.

I would, nevertheless, wish to persuade myself, that the importunities of the world are the only cause of your displeasure. I will explain the motives which doomed me to support them. I was aware, that for some time, there had been many reports injurious to my character, and I thought it necessary to endeavour to regain the good opinion of those upon whose minds such imputations, however unjust, might have made some impression. Madam d'Artenas thought it proper that I should

re-appear in society; and it is from her goodness in (yesterday) assembling at her own house, what are called in Paris, the *leaders of the band* of opinion, that I had an opportunity not of justifying myself, for to that I should not have submitted, but of resuming my rank in a fashionable circle. Need I tell it you, Leonce, it is on your account that I am so solicitous to disarm calumny. I should be insensible to her attacks, did they not affect me through the impression they may make upon you. The secret of my conduct for the last ten days, was, perhaps, the wish of presenting to your view, her, whom your mother did not think worthy of your hand, surrounded with consideration and respect.

You almost reproach me for my gaiety of disposition. Alas! As I yesterday entered Madam d'Artenas's drawing-room, I, at first, felt an impression of melancholy. I entered the world, for the first time since the death of Madam de Vernon, and

and you must forgive me for not being able to think of her without tenderness. I was, however, aware of the necessity of concealing this disposition. Had I shewn any appearance of melancholy in the midst of the world, far from its being attributed to the affliction which occasioned it, it would have been said that I was uneasy on account of the reports respecting M. de Subellane and myself, and I should thus have been defeated in my only purpose. One must either entirely fly from the world, or not appear in it but in triumph: the society of Paris is of all societies that, in which pity is most suddenly converted into accusation.

It was therefore, in consequence of a painful effort, that I entered that successful career, which you take a pleasure in describing with so much bitterness. Yet I must admit that I was animated by the conversation; I was animated—must it be told you?—by the pleasure of shining in your presence. I observed you close to me;

me; I often looked towards you, to divine your opinion; a smile from you convinced me, that I had expressed myself gracefully; and the sensation excited by society, when one enters into all its feelings, was singularly encreased by your presence. The emotion which it made me feel, inspired me with thoughts and expressions which gave pleasure to all around me. I addressed myself to you by ambiguous allusions; and on the most general questions I uttered not a single word which had not some relation to you; and a relation which you only could perceive, but which you pretended not to remark.

But, be this as it may, you may believe me that she who, when in the world, sees nothing but you, will be a thousand times more delighted with you in retirement; and I myself should have been the first to propose going to Bellerive, had I not feared that by taking up my residence in the country in the middle of winter, I should attract

attract attention to my feelings. Those who are accustomed to the world of Paris cannot conceive how it is possible to endure solitude, and exert their utmost fury in aspersing the motives of those who take the resolution of retiring. I give you this information before hand, in order, that, if the measure I am about to take, injure my reputation, you may be prepared for it, and not forget that it was adopted at your own request. In all the misfortunes which may befal me, I fear nothing but what may tend to wound your character.

The kind of life which you propose to me, has a thousand times greater charms for me than for you. I hate the dissimulation which I should be compelled to practise in the world. I shall think, that I breathe a purer air when I see no person from whom I should conceal the only interest which engages my attention. I annex one condition only to my acquiescence—a condition which shall be invariable, whatever may befal us, that you will

will not conceal from me what Matilda may know of our mutual affection; and I have your promise that if it gives her any unhappiness, I may instantly set off, without your attempting to follow me. It is this assurance which permits me to enjoy, without too bitter a remorse, the pleasure of seeing you. Alas! to content myself with that promise, is not an instance of much severity towards myself. Adieu, Leonce. Yes you shall come every evening to Bellerive. Ah! what a pleasing hope! recollect, however, that of all the situations in life, ours is the most uncertain. We are happy but have every thing to fear: my friend make the best of our destiny.

LETTER XIII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Jan. 2, 1791.

Unutterable happiness!
Which love alone bestows and on a favoured few.
THOMSON.

OH! Delphine, how just was my conduct in desiring what your heart has so generously granted me! how much happier was I yesterday at Bellerive, than on any of the days when I saw you at Paris! I found you alone, and I was assured that this happiness would be uninterrupted. This reflection mingled a delicious serenity with my transports.

What charm did you shed over the detail of life, which pass unnoticed amidst the bustle of cities! what attentions did you not shew me! the snow by the way had somewhat numbed me; your beautiful hands

hands were a considerable time employed in blowing up the fire in order to restore my warmth. How much less amiable would it have been to call any of your servants to perform the office! you also took the highest pleasure in shewing me what alterations you intend to make for the embellishment of your seat. Having found you hitherto so indifferent to this sort of taste and occupation, it seemed to me, and you agreed with me, that your happiness made you take an interest in every thing, and that you loved to decorate every spot which we cease to wander over together. My heart did not neglect the most trivial observation, which could give me a proof of your tenderness. I even remarked those shrubs covered with flowers, which have been lately placed in your cabinet. That apartment was almost destitute of ornament when you appropriated it to the reception of the most splendid company in France; you have given it a holiday appearance for Leonce—for your friend.

Oh!

Oh! how much did I delight in that vivacity, teeming with charms, with which you related to me the slightest trifles! An affecting joy animated your frame; your gaiety was not then the result of a sportive imagination, but an emotion of the heart. I smiled at the serious preparations made for supper by you who had never before, in the whole course of your life, wasted a thought upon such a subject; but you were anxious to assure yourself that I should have something of a restorative nature which could do me good, after the cold I had experienced. I yesterday discovered in you attractions entirely new to me, having never had occasion to witness them. The cares of domestic life have a singular grace in females. The most captivating of all women, the most distinguished for wit and beauty, does not disdain those kind and simple attentions, which it is sometimes pleasing to find at home. Oh! what a woman should I have possessed! and I might have united myself to you, I might....—Wretch that I am! what have I said? No!

No! I am not wretched! but in daily loving you with greater ardor, my sorrows also daily become more cruel. In ſhort tell me, if it be possible to make you ever submit to be loved by me.

With what earnestness did you insist that we should remain faithful to the projected plan of occupying our time in reading together. Ah! you dreaded those soft reveries of love, which, of themselves, were sufficient to occupy my heart! I was desirous that we should, at least, select all of those books, in which I might find some description of the feelings which animated my bosom; but this request you obstinately refused. But no matter, my dear Delphine, your voice, though employed in reading to me, will inspire me with nothing but love. Speak in your own name, or, if you will, in the name of God himself; but let your hand be clasped in mine, and let me have the privilege of frequently pressing it to my heart. Tutelary angel of my life, adieu, till the evening.

LETTER XIV.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

I was not satisfied with you yesterday, my dear Leonce. I never thought you were so indifferent to religious sentiments, and I venture to find fault with that indifference. Your morality has no other foundation than honor. You would have been much happier had you adopted those true and simple principles, which by subjecting our actions to the dictates of conscience, emancipates us from every other yoke. You cannot but know, that the education which I have received, instead of subjugating my mind, has perhaps rendered it too independant. It is even possible that superstition itself might be suited to the condition of females. Those tottering beings require a variety of supports; and

and love is a sort of credulity, which perhaps very easily blends with every other species. But the generous protector of my infant years had sufficient regard for my character to induce him to develope my understanding, and never desired me to adopt an opinion until I had investigated it with all the information I possessed. I may therefore speak to you on the religion I love, which I have freely and candidly examined with all the powers of my mind and my soul; and you cannot ascribe the sentiments I am about to disclose, to habits which authority has imposed, or to impressions received in the unreflecting period of infancy. I assure you, that ever since my mind was at all formed, the indifference and levity too often displayed by the world on religious ideas, has always excited in me strong feelings of disapprobation and repugnance. Whatever may be the degree of conviction, of hope, or of doubt, is of inferior importance; the soul prostrates itself before a

chance as it would before a certainty, when it is filled with that one grand idea which still hovers over the destiny of mankind.

I was penetrated with these sentiments, Leonce, before I knew what it was to love: how powerfully must I not feel them now, when that passion expands my heart with ideas that are boundless, and wishes that never can end! I shall not attempt to retrace all the various kinds of proof which doubtless have engaged your attention; but let me ask you, whether you have since you loved me, felt in your heart something which revealed to you the hope of immortality.

At the death of M. d'Albemar, I was not quite without a religious belief; but I never before felt the necessity of recurring to it. I was then so young that no painful sentiment had ever reached my heart, and those who have experienced no sorrow cannot have exercised much reflection. But on the death of my benefactor I was persuaded that I had not done enough for his happiness,

happiness, and this idea was followed by the most tormenting remorse. The extreme difference of our ages, when he became my husband, frequently raised in my mind melancholy reflections on my situation. I feared I had sometimes given vent to those feelings, and now that he had ceased to live, I could not avoid reproaching myself for entertaining them. Nothing can be more horrible than the idea of repentance, when there are no possible means of expiation, when death has for ever deprived you of the hope of repairing the wrongs you have committed. So great was the influence of this melancholy reflection, that it would have affected my reason, had not the excellent sister of M. d'Albemar calmed my mind by representing to it, with new force, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. Convinced that my generous friend was the witness of my sorrow, I at last believed that he had accepted my contrition, and

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the idea of his pardon poured consolation into my heart.

I executed his last orders with a religious punctuality: every time I fulfilled any of his wishes, I experienced an exquisite sensation which gives me the assurance that our souls still hold communication. What would have become of me, had I thought there was no longer any part of him in existence? What should I have done with my repentance? How could its pain have deen mitigated, or where was I seek for consolation for the slightest of my errors, if I had believed that he had received the seal of eternity? Shall it be said that those emotions of gratitude, those sentiments of regret which attach us to the dead, form the only falshood of nature, the only grief without an object, the only desire without hope? Recollection, the most noble faculty of the soul would then prove our torment, by making us bestow our sorrows on nothing but the dispersed dust of those who were his friends.

It is true, my dear Leonce, I am not afraid of surviving you. I never shall weep over your tomb; for my life is insepa-rable from yours; but if that shocking system which has annihilation for its term, were to take possession of my soul, horror would be mingled with my love. How could I cherish the tender affection I feel for you, if I thought that all your excellent qualities were only the result of one of those happy combinations of chance which time produces and destroys? Could we, in the intimacy of our souls, search our most secret thoughts to entrust them to each other, when at last all our reflections must terminate in despair? An extraordinary sensation obscures my mind, when any process of reasoning snatches from it for a moment the hope of futurity, and encloses it within the narrow boundary of this life. I then feel that every thing is lost to me. I have no longer any confidence in myself; I tremble at the thought of being for ever separated from

him

him I love. It seems to me that his countenance becomes pale, that his voice is lost in the gloom that surrounds me: I see him placed on the brink of an abyss. Every moment in which I speak to him, appears to me the last, since one must arrive to finish our intercourse for ever, and my soul experiences the agitation of fear, instead of the enjoyment of love.

But oh! how the sentiment of love is strengthened! how it elevates us when two souls mutually animate each other to place their trust in the Supreme Being. Do not Leonce, do not resist the consolations which natural religion can afford. It is not possible for our minds to be convinced on this subject by positive argument, but our sensibility can teach us all that is necessary to be known, Take but a slight view of human destiny; you will there perceive only a few delightful moments of youth and love followed by a length of declining years which conduct from sorrow to sorrow, and from

from terror to terror, until the whole is closed by the awful hand of death. Hope is of all things most necessary to man, and yet his existence, after his twenty-fifth year, consists only of a series of days, of which the present is always better than the next. He wishes to pause when he finds himself on the declivity of life; he clings to each twig in order that his steps may carry him less rapidly towards old age and the grave. He incessantly dreads the period for which the imagination is formed, the only one from which it never can be detached, futurity. Oh, Leonce, is this all the use of life? Is this soul of fire given to us for no purpose, but to be slowly extinguished in the agony of age?

By the faculty of loving I am enabled to feel within me the immortal source of life. What! shall my ashes be laid near thine without the hope of reviving! Shall we, for ever, be strangers to that nature which speaks so powerfully to the soul! Shall that magnificent sky whose aspect excites

so many noble sentiments, and sublime ideas?—Shall those brilliant stars of night and of day, arise on our tomb, as they rose on our happiest hours, and nothing of us remain to admire them! No, Leonce, the idea of annihilation is as dreadful to me as that of guilt, and the same conscience teaches me to abhor both.

But how melancholy must be my hope if you do not partake of it? Shall I deliver up my soul to a future state which is not recognized as yours? What idea can my imagination afford me of happiness if it is not to be enjoyed with you? How shall I continue those solitary meditations which are not encouraged by your voice? I am capable of nothing by myself; I require to examine with you all my thoughts, in order to judge of them, admit them, and attach them to my love. Oh! Leonce, Leonce, believe with me, that I may hope in peace, that I may follow thy brilliant course in that heaven, where my eyes seek thy place before they aspire to mine.

Indeed Leonce, there exists another world, in which the factitious bonds of this are broken; where no enjoyment is promised but the love of those we love: Oh! be not impious to this hope! The happiness which sensibility gives, instead of diverting us like other pleasures, from paying that homage of gratitude which is due to the Creator, turns our minds incessantly towards him; the nearer we approach perfection, the more necessary becomes the idea of a Deity: and the more ardent and pure the affection of the heart, the less possible is it for us to resign them to the bounds of this life. I conjure you Leonce, never allow yourself to speak with pleasantry of my desire, to inspire your soul with religious ideas. I should even doubt your love for me, if I could not succeed at least in making you respect those great questions, which have interested so many enlightened minds, and calmed so many suffering souls.

Levity in the principles of conduct, soon leads to levity in sentiment. The art of speech may easily turn in derision every thing most sacred on earth; but the impassioned character repulses that superficial pride, which attacks all the powerful and deep rooted affections. The enthusiasm which love inspires, is a new principle of life. Some enjoy it, but it is as unknown to others, as that future existence to which you will not turn your thoughts. We feel in ourselves, sentiments which vulgar souls cannot comprehend, let us then also hope for those blessings, of which we have at present but a confined prospect. Sublime ideas are as necessary to love as to virtue.

But, alas! is it fit that I should speak of virtue! I well know that pure morality would already reprove my conduct; and I am more severely judged by my own conscience, then I should be by the opinions received in the world; but I love the justice of Heaven better than the indulgence

of man! Though I have not the resolution to renounce seeing you, I am convinced that I shall better preserve the natural qualities of my heart, by offering, each day, my repentance to the Supreme Being, than by seeking to doubt the power which condemns me.

The education which you have received, Leonce, the example and the recollection of the ancient Spanish manners, the military and romantic ideas which charmed your infancy, seem to you capable of supplying the place of the most delicate principles of religion and morality. All generous characters experience a pleasure in making sacrifices, and you have formed of the sentiment of honor, an almost superstitious respect for public opinion, an idol to which you would immolate yourself with joy. But if religious ideas occupied your mind, you would be less sensible to the praise or the blame of the world; and, alas! perhaps calumny would not be so easily able either to irritate or convince

 you.

you. Oh! my friend! devote to Heaven some of those qualities which distinguish you from other men. You will then find in your own approbation, a consolation which no one can disturb; and I shall also be more tranquil respecting my fate. Religious ideas, even when they condemn love, never dry up the source of that generous paſſion; but the perfidious falsehoods of the world wither for ever the affections of him who dreads, and yet obeys their influence.

You see, Leonce, that when speculating with you on the gravest subjects, I constantly revert to that interest by which I am governed, to your sentiment of attachment for me. Neither this letter, nor any other action of my life, can henceforth be attributed to virtue; for love alone is the origin of all the good as well as all the evil I perform

LETTER

LETTER XV.

LEONCE'S ANSWER TO DELPHINE.

God is thy law, thou mine.
MILTON.

MY Delphine, I at first wished to reply to your letter by a personal interview: I should then have thrown myself at your feet, and would have said: art not thou the absolute mistress of my soul? Present it as an homage, if thou wilt, to the Supreme Being; dispose of that which is thy own. Adore, in my name, that Providence which is doubtless best manifested to the most perfect of created things; for thee alone do I experience enthusiasm. That pleasing melancholy, those elevated ideas, which are the sources of religion to thee, serve only to impel me towards thy image: thou hast completely filled in me that vacancy of the heart which, in thee, renders the idea of a God

God so necessary. I have, however, resolved to write before I speak to you, that my answer may be the more calm.

I never would wish to combat your angelic hopes: may they be founded in truth! but allow me for once to vindicate myself from those faults with which you accuse me, and the fatal influence of which you so erroneously read, alas! I have not forgotton the day which has infused its poison into the whole of my life. I do not think, however, that my character ought to be blamed on that account. It was jealousy which agitated me; and had it not been for that passion every thing would have been speedily explained. It is true I regard my reputation as of the greatest importance, and I could not endure to live were my name, disgraced by the slightest violation of the laws of honor; but what has she I love, to fear from this sentiment? Does it not give me the right, the happiness of defending her against

all those who dare to calumniate her? It has often been said, that women ought to be more careful how they offend against public opinion than men: I do not think so, —To protect those we love, to cover with our personal glory, the companion of our life, is a duty we owe ourselves: if we lose that personal reputation, nothing can restore it; but a woman, though attacked by opinion, may recover her character, by taking the name of an honorable man, associating her existence with his, and receiving under his tutelary protection, the homage he is capable of procuring her.

All women are enthusiastic admirers of valor; but that quality which it is not possible to suppose any man can want, cannot sufficiently ensure him the respect of the world, unless he join to it an imposing character.—Intrepid courage cannot alone obtain that degree of honor and esteem, which a dignified mind desires. The daily

daily circumstances, on which, taken together, personal consideration is founded, involve not questions of life or death: but he who displays in his habitual conduct, a proper dignity, a scrupulous respect for all the delicate sentiments, even all the prejudices of honor, is never censured by the public: he preserves entire, that reputation which forms the real existence of a man of honor, and which enables him to punish by his contempt, or reward by his approbation.

If I cannot conceal from the world your sentiment for me, I hope at least that my reputation will serve for your apology. You say, you would not have me to depend on the opinion of men: you know I never desire their society: all I wish for is to pass my life at your feet. It is I who still more than you, cherish solitude. But I will feel myself assailed by the censures of the same men, who's opinions in

any other circumstances would be indifferent to me.

But why should this mode of thinking displease you? The same warmth of blood which inspires the empassioned affections, makes us powerfully feel the slightest appearance of injury or insult. The bold and warlike virtues which distinguished the heroes of antiquity are allied with the feelings of love. Enthusiasm is not inspired by religious ideas alone. If our ancestors have transmitted to us a respectable name; the desire of imitating them is honorable. The enjoyments arising from the pursuit of glory affect the soul with not less force than the pious hopes of the faithful; and if I do not indulge in the unknown happiness of meeting you again in heaven, I feel strongly that I ought to make you respected on earth, and that I shall experience the sincerest pleasure in exposing my life a thousand times in your behalf, to wipe from your character even the shadow

of

of blame; or to free you from the slightest uneasiness.

Delphine—do not say that my character distresses and afflicts you. I know not if my heart is deceived, but I have often been inclined to think that you loved me for those very faults which you dread? Do they not present you a support on which you delight to repose? Your adorable qualities, your beauty, and your wit, excite envy, and envy creates to you many enemies. You pay little attention to those arbitrary institutions of society by which ordinary minds are directed. Your grace is easy and natural; you speak from the first impulse of your feelings, and this impulse is the real genius that inspires you. But what constitutes your greatest charm with those who know you, is the chief source of your danger in the conduct of life.

Tell me then, Delphine, is it not of such a protector as I am that you stand in need. My character sufficiently steady, and suffi-

ciently calm to outward appearance, will serve to direct the exercise of your goodness, ever exposed to difficulties. You expose yourself to dangers; I will protect you. From the same cause you excite at once jealousy and admiration around you; your superiority of understanding might inspire awe, but the gentleness and kindness of your nature, give confidence to those who wish to destroy you. You should have had near you a man at once irritable and bold, who would not suffer the vicious part of mankind at once to enjoy the double pleasure of being delighted with all that is amiable in your character, and of endeavouring to rob you of the qualities which render you lovely. Oh! If I had been your husband: if I had enjoyed the right of disclosing the whole extent of my love in the presence of all, never would malignity have once dared to approach your steps; and now, notwithstanding all that has happened, is it incumbent on me to practice dissimulation.

lation. No:—I have received from your love the guardianship of your honor and your happiness, and to me it belongs to preserve it.

You are convinced that religious ideas are the best support of morality; that they have a much more beneficial influence than the laws of honor or regard for public opinion. Believe me, honor has its conscience as well as religion, and the idea of being sunk in one's own estimation is a grief more insupportable than all the feeling of remorse, arising from the hopes or the fears of a future world. The sentiment which rules over me is the most imperious of all. I have read in an English Poet these words, which I shall never forget: *Tears can wash out crimes, but never a sense of infamy,*

Nor tears that wash our guilt, can wash our shame.

PRIOR.

Repentance gives the hope of pardon to the religious, but for honor there is no repentance. What a thought! how powerfully even in the earliest years of life does it induce a habit of never yielding to the emotion of weakness, and of never repelling the most secret feelings when they are suggested by delicacy. But even if man does not embrace all the branches of morality, cannot sensibility fill up what is left imperfect.

In what duty then can he be deficient who respects and adores you? Delphine, pardon me for being incapable of conceiving, or of desiring more. I am not altogether ignorant that my character has in it a degree of gloom, of susceptibility, and of violence, which might poison those qualities which I myself believe to be good. Your empire over me will modify my faults, but will not wholly change their nature.

I have

I have thought it necessary to say something in my justification to calm your uneasiness; I have thought it proper to justify myself, to present myself, if I am able, with more advantage before you. The opinion of all the rest of the world, whatever importance I attach to it, could not have inspired me with such ardor in my defence.

LETTER XVI.

MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Paris, 6th February, 1791.

WHY do you prolong your stay in the country, my dear Delphine? Every one is astonished at seeing you quit Paris in the middle

middle of winter, at the moment when your appearance in the gay world was so brilliant. Some persons begin to whisper that your attachment to Leonce is the only cause of your sacrifice. I have often told you, that you were in the wrong to withdraw yourself; your grand hope of success consists in your presence. Your manners are all so simple, and so amiable, that all the admiration you excite, is beheld without jealousy. But when you withdraw yourself, the attachment of your friends is cooled, for this is in the very nature of friendship, and the spirits of your enemies are elated, from the hope of success.

In fifteen days, you completely removed the prejudices raised against you in consequence of your supposed connection with M. Serbellane, and all at once you give up the field to envious women and to men, by whom their propensity to scandal is encouraged.

But you will tell me, that in the country you can more easily indulge in the feelings

which

which are dearest to your heart; that your thoughts and your actions are more free from embarrassment. Accident, and your confidence, having made me acquainted with your attachment to Leonce, I wish to give you a useful moral lesson, when I tell you that you act very improperly, in thus passing the half of your life alone with him. But confining myself to the principles which I know you to possess, and limiting my advice merely to considerations of external interest, I tell you, that to support the enthusiasm with which Leonce has inspired you, it is necessary that you should continue to dazzle by your success. He was impassioned, almost to folly the night that you spent at my house; and though no doubt he boasts of the charms of conversation with you when there is no one present to hear your vows of affection; believe me, when he hears all Paris speaking loudly of your charms, when he hears every one exclaiming that no other woman can be compared to you, he

he will be still more flattered by your attachment, and will experience a greater degree of satisfaction. Do not exclaim that there is nothing at all romantic in this manner of seeing him. You ought to consider, that the happiness of sentiment, as every other kind of happiness, must be preserved with wisdom; and to render even the happiness of being adored, which is always accompanied with danger, as long-lived as possible, it is necessary to employ the assistance of reason. Whatever are the means of inspiring affection, I do not now speak of them; you understand them too well to stand in need of my counsels. What is now to be provided for, however, is your existence in the world and the whisper which precedes the open attack has already been heard for several days. The day before yesterday, Mad. de Crorssy, who hitherto had prevailed on her self-love to express admiration for you, said with an affected air, "that for a conversation of sentiment, I pitch my feelings

a whole octave." My God! what uneasiness it gives me, that Mad. d'Albemar is established at Bellerive! No one knows better than I do, that it is her taste for study which has fixed her in that retreat. But other people will put a different construction on her conduct, and we ought not unnecessarily to expose ourselves to censure. This malignant proof of the interest which Mad. de Crorssy takes in you, was the first signal of the scandal which was preparing against you. M. de Vernueil, who is so little able to conceal the chagrin which the admiration you at all times receive, excites in his bosom, replied Mad. de Albemar, is doubtless an excellent person; but I am much afraid her head is a little turned. These ladies of genius, I often repeated to my poor sister in her life-time, always experience some misfortune or other. I have had several instances of this in my own family; and therefore I am much more pleased with plain common sense. Nobody

says that I possess genius, because I do not wish that any such opinion should be formed of me; besides, what a difference is there betwixt the male and female sex. There are occasions when it may, perhaps, be useful to a man to discover among those who are his dupes, something like superiority of understanding and liveliness of wit. But a woman, a woman! Oh, my God! it serves no other purpose in her but to make her guilty of follies and absurdities. When I say this, it is not that I am not fond of Mad. d'Albemar, but I much dread some sad accident will destroy her repose. Her conversation, I readily allow, is to me extremely amusing, but that it would not be prudent to form an intimate connection with her, for I am persuaded that one day or other she will experience severe sufferings, and I am not at all desirous of being in that situation which would make it necessary for me to share them. Mad. de Tesin, who you know has double preten-

pretensions to wisdom and wit, interrupted M. de Vernueil, and said to him, "it is not, sir, it is not genius which you ought to blame. We know persons, who in this respect may, without difficulty, be compared to Madame d'Albemar, but who possess much more knowledge of the world, and are much better acquainted with the mode of properly conducting themselves. These persons are not contented with shining in a drawing-room, but employ their talents in endeavouring to avoid occasions of traducing their characters, or injuring their interests. Distinguish, I beseech you, Sir, betwixt the errors which the levity of Mad. d'Albemar produces, and the general inconvenience of a superiority of understanding and wit. Wit is what eminently distinguishes women, celebrated for their superiority of mind." I was preparing to enter into a dispute on this subject with Mad. de Tesin and M. de Vernueil, when Mad. du Marset and M. de Fierville sought to lead the conversation to you,

and

and they did this with a degree of address truly perfidious. I wished to avoid saying any thing in your support, because that would have been to grant that you had been attacked, but it was necessary to put an end to their conversation. I had at last the happiness of persuading those who listened to me. What fully proved this, was, that M. de Fierville, who at all times gives to Mad. du Marset the signal of retreat, because he has less bitterness and less perseverance in his sarcasms, hastened to reply, by loading you with praises. I could have easily shewn him the contradiction betwixt the beginning of the conversation, and its conclusion; but I did not wish to interest his self-love, by making him a man of consequence. I have frequently had occasion to remark in society, that a great deal of injury is frequently done to friends, even in their justification, when the self-love of those who attack them is roused. Much more caution and skill is requisite, when we are

to

MAHARAJA

to praise a friend, than to blame a person who is indifferent to us. If a friend is to be defended, with honor, we must avoid all allusion to ourselves, for if pains are taken to extol our own character, while we pretend to speak only of his, we injure him materially instead of rendering him a service.

I believed, the day before yesterday, that this matter was settled; but yesterday, Mad. du Marset (I am confident it was her), instigated a woman in all respects insignificant, but of whom she has the entire disposal to speak against you, because Madame du Marset would not have been listened to. This woman, accordingly, after a deep sigh, suddenly exclaimed, "poor Mad. de Mondeville!" Every one present began to ask for the reasons of this pity, and she, without hesitation, replied that she believed the unhappy passion which Leonce had for you, was to her a cause of very great misery. At this moment, M. de Fierville, who of all the men in the world is the

least

least disposed to indulge in melancholy ideas, assumed an air of concern truly ludicrous. Mad. du Marset raised her eyes to heaven, hoping by this means to give herself an air of benevolent compassion; and though she is in her maxims and domestic duties, the most frivolous and least scrupulous of women, she displayed the utmost eagerness to inculcate the severest doctrines, and expatiated strongly on the duties you owed to Mad. de Mondeville.

When a Parisian company discovers a disposition to apply strict morality against any particular individual; it is then more than in any other instance that their opinions and decisions are formidable. The greater part of those who compose this society, are in general extremely indulgent to their own conduct, and frequently too to that of others, when they have no interest in blaming it; but if unhappily it is agreed on to take up the serene side of the question, nothing then is to be heard but grave lectures on duty and principle, and the

the rigour of their language is much greater than the severity of women really austere, who regulate their own conduct by the rules they employ, when judging of the conduct of others. Those descriptions of virtue, which excite our jealousy and ill will, are clothed in all the charms of rhetoric, and on certain occasions libertines and coquets expatiate on them with the utmost passion. I bore all this for some time, but at length supported by several of your friends, I said that I was perfectly sure of the happiness of Mad. de Mondeville, and their detestable designs were for the present frustrated. But in this way a repetition of victories amounts to a defeat. I conjure you then, my dear Delphine, return to Paris, and shew yourselves for the purpose of annihilating these obscure and petty enmities, by the admiration you must ever excite in all who behold you. In the midst of the most brilliant societies there are a number of individuals not deficient in impartiality, who suffer themselves

to

to be guided by first impressions, without judging of them by their own pretensions or those of others. This large number, for the number of the good is always large, will espouse your cause. But these very same persons being weak and destitute of any particular feeling of interest, suffer your enemies to speak, when you cannot awe them into silence by your irresistable charms. At first they do not listen to them at all; it is some time before they will believe them, but at length they persuade themselves that all the world speaks ill of you, and adopt that opinion which they believe to be general, and which they have rendered such, without being sincerely convinced of its truth.

This sketch of the progress of calumny is equally applicable to the greatest public interests, as to the details of private society. But since we are aware of its artifices, let us endeavour to guard against them. I conclude with again entreating you, my dear Delphine, to confide in my aged

counsels. They are dictated by friendship, which possesses all the warmth and fervor of youth.

LETTER XVII.

ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO MADAME D'ARTENAS.

Bellerive, Feb. 8th.

ALL that you tell me Madam, is replete with judgment and good sense; and what still more affects me, your perfect friendship for me is visible in every line of your letter. I would follow your advice, had I not resolved to pass my life in solitude. I am aware how much I expose myself to that calumny, which you with so much kindness attempt to combat. But when I sacrifice to the happiness of Leonce, that duty

duty which would, perhaps, prohibit me from continuing to see him; the slightest wish on his part is sufficient to reconcile me to the sacrifice of my existence in the world. He has requested that I should remain at Bellerive; my return to Paris would make him unhappy. Say then whether I can think of returning. Ah! I ought to overlook his sufferings, in order to retire into Languedoc, to retire from the danger of his presence, from the impropriety of participating an attachment which I ought to repel; but to give him a moments regret for the sake of attending to what are called my own interests, is what I will never do.

I am convinced Matilda is happy. I make daily enquiries as to her mode of life; and I know even the slightest gradations of her impressions. If she discovered my attachment for Leonce, and if that attachment, though of the purest kind, gave her any offence, I would set off that instant. I would, perhaps, even depart without that

motive,

motive, were the sentiments which I entertain for him not altogether sufficient for the consolation of Leonce, and were I able in a moment of resolution, to renounce a situation which my own mind condemns. Never in that case, would I return to Paris; never should those who busy themselves in judging of my conduct see me again in the whole course of their lives; nor could any thing, for the future, give me either pleasure or pain.

But whatever may befal me, never shall I forget that protecting friendship of which you have given me incessant proofs. At the moment when I received your letter, I had some thought of going to pass a few hours at Paris, for the purpose of expressing my gratitude towards you; but Mad. de Mondeville, having, in consequence of the lent season, shut herself up in the convent where she received her education, I have fixed upon to-morrow in order to propose to Leonce to accompany me on a visit to a family from Languedoc, who

who have come to live in my neigbourhood, and whom I have long been desirous of seeing. In a few days I shall indemnify myself for the loss which I sustain in not seeing you. It is you only who could make me quit my retreat. Forgive me for not regretting any one at Paris except you.

LETTER XVIII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, Feb. 10.

YOU ask me, my friend, whether I am happy; and laying aside the austerity of a master, you tell me, that you are interested above all things, in discovering the inmost sentiments of my heart. Why did you not make this enquiry a few days ago?

ago? I then enjoyed greater self-complacency. I fear that the evening of yesterday, has thrown me into a state of disquietude, from which I cannot henceforward rescue myself. You will be able to form a more accurate estimate of my feelings, when I relate to you what has happened; to retrace it, is at once, a pleasing and a painful task.

For more than a month, I enjoyed the happiness of daily seeing that angelic being, whom you had selected as the companion of my life. Impetuous desires, and invincible regrets, sometimes took possession of my soul, during the most delicious moments of our conversations; but, at length happiness predominated over misery. At present I know not whether the conflict is not too violent, and whether I can ever again experience those soft impressions, which enabled me to taste the imperfect enjoyments of my destiny.

 Yesterday,

Yesterday, Mad. de Mandeville being absent, I had an opportunity of passing the whole day at Bellerive. Mad. d'Albemar proposed to me a walk after dinner, telling me that a family from Languedoc, whose name she thought she recollected, had come to reside close by her, and that she wished we should go together to enquire respecting them. We set out, and Mad. d'Albemar ordered her carriage to meet us half a league from Bellerive.

When we approached the place where we were informed they resided, we observed at a little distance, a cottage small, but neat, and heard the sound of voices and musical instruments, forming a concert, which we thought uncommonly harmonious. On reaching the cottage, a child who stood in the door amusing itself with making snow-balls, offered to shew us in; but the mother on hearing its voice, came out to meet us. Mad. d'Albemar, though ſhe had not seen her

for

for ten years before, instantly recognized Madlle. de Seuanges, whom she had sometimes met at the parties of M. d'Albemar. Madlle. de Seuanges, now Mad. de Belmont, gave Delphine the most amiable and kind reception. We followed her into the little apartment, which served as her parlour, where we found a man, about thirty years of age, seated before a piano-forte, on which he accompanied the voice of a daughter about eight years old. He rose from his seat, at our entrance, and his wife immediately going up to him, gave him the assistance of her arm, as he advanced to meet us. We then perceived that he was blind; but notwithstanding the loss of his sight, his figure still retained somewhat of an engaging and dignified air; while all his features displayed an expression of serenity, which even repressed a rising emotion of pity.

Delphine, whose heart is so accessible to the emotions of benevolence, was visibly

agitated, notwithstanding all her efforts to conceal her feelings. She put a question to Mad. de Belmont, respecting the motives of her departure from Languedoc ——. The loss of a law-suit, answered she, in which M. de Belmont and myself were engaged, plunged us into irretrievable ruin. I had already been deprived of one half my fortune, by an aunt having disinherited me on account of my marriage. All that remains for my husband, my children, and myself, is a revenue of eighty louis d'or. We preferred living in a country where we were entirely unknown, to the necessity of preserving (without a fortune to sustain the expense), our former connections in society. Besides, this climate agrees better with my husband's health than the warm climate of the South; and during the fortnight we have passed here, we find ourselves perfectly pleased with the situation.

M. de Belmont then said a few words to the effect of congratulating himself on being

ing acquainted with a person of Mad. d'Albemar's character. He expressed himself with considerable grace and propriety; and his wife, remarking with a feeling of pleasure, that she had seen Mad. d'Albemar when but a child at her father's house, talked to her of their common relations with the moſt perfect simplicity and serenity. I looked at her attentively, but in no part of her manner could I discern the slightest trace of any cause of unhappiness. She did not even seem to surmise that there was, in her situation, any thing which could excite an extraordinary interest, and it was a considerable time before she perceived that with which it had inspired our bosoms.

Her husband, wishing to shew us his garden, gave his arm to his wife, in order to conduct him thither. She seemed to have been so much accustomed to lead him, that when, upon going to give some directions, she for a moment intrusted his arm to Delphine; she walked away with a kind

kind of uneasiness, turned back repeatedly, and appeared not disturbed, for she has too much simplicity to be apprehensive without a motive, but as if completely out of the habit of making a single step, when except she performs the part of a guide to her husband.

M. de Belmont every moment increased the interest which we had taken in his fate, by the charms of his wit, and the solidity of his understanding. We repeatedly engaged him in a conversation respecting his avocations and interests. He always replied to us with pleasure, seeming completely to forget that he was blind and ruined, giving us the impression of a man happy and tranquil, who, in the whole course of his life has not had the slightest occasion to practice any effort of courage, nor even of resignation; only in pronouncing the name of his wife, and in calling her my dear friend, he spoke in an accent which I cannot define, but which vibrated to all the remembrances of his life, and made

made us comprehend them without their being expressed.

We returned to the house. The piano-forte was still uncovered, and Delphine expressed a wish to M. and Mad. Belmont, to hear, while present, the music which charmed us at a distance. They consented to gratify her, informing us at the same time, that as they almost always sung trios with their daughter, the piece of music we were to hear would be extremely simple. The father then executed a prelude on the harpsicord, in a style which evinced superior talent and profound sensibility. I cannot conceive a more affecting object than a blind man, inspired with an enthusiasm for music. One would almost imagine that the diversity of sounds, and the impressions which they produce, give him back that enjoyment of all nature, of which he has been deprived. The timidity inseparable from so unfortunate an infirmity prevents him

 from

from mentioning to others the regret which he feels, while they, on the other hand, almost always avoid talking of it to him. But when a blind man entertains you with a musical air of a melancholy cast, it should seem as if he communicated the secret of his woes; and he rejoices in having at length, attained that delicious language which permits him to melt the heart, without the fear of fatiguing it.

The beautiful eyes of my Delphine were filled with tears, and, from the heaving of her bosom, I could perceive the deep emotions of her soul! But when M. de Belmont and his wife began to sing in concert, and their daughter, eight years old, mingled her clear infantile voice with those of her parents, it was impossible to resist the impression. They gave us one of the airs sung by the reaping girls of Languedoc, the rustic burthen of which is to this effect:

O mo-

O mother grant my fond desire,
For life, my lover be my spouse;
I'll love him with such tender vows,
As you through life have loved my sire.

The little daughter raised her eyes towards her mother as she sung these words. Her countenance beamed with innocence; but being brought up with parents who lived only in the exercise of the tender affections, she had already in her look and voice that expression of melancholy which is so interesting at her age, that melancholy which is a presage of the destiny that menaces the child, while she remains unconscious of the omen. The mother took up the same burthen, varying the words in this manner:

Thy mother grants thy fond desire,
For life, thy lover be thy spouse;
And love him with such tender vows,
As she through life, has loved thy sire.

As she sung the last line, there was something so impassioned in the look of

Mad. de Belmont, and this emotion was soon succeeded by so much modesty, that I felt myself penetrated with respect and enthusiastic admiration for those generous ties of family, which can inspire at once such heart-felt elation and happiness. The father then sung in his turn:

> Be like thy mother, I desire,
> And take thy lover for thy spouse;
> And love him with such tender vows,
> As she through life has loved thy sire.

In pronouncing these words, M. de Belmont entirely lost his voice; and it was with some difficulty that he recovered it, while all the three repeated the burthen in chorus, to a wild air which still seemed to be returned on the ear by the echoes of the Pyrenees.

Their voices were perfectly adapted to each other. That of the husband, deep and sonorous, blended a dignified boldness with the soft tones of the females. Their situation, the expression of their features, every

every thing harmonized with the purest sensibility. There was nothing to interrupt it; there was nothing wanting even to the imagination itself. Delphine has since told me that the commisseration which she felt on beholding so perfect an union of all that could touch the soul, was so excessive, that she no longer had strength to support it. She was quite overpowered with her tears, when Mad. de Belmont threw herself almost into her arms and said, "Amiable Delphine, I know you well; but do you believe us unhappy? Ah! how much you are deceived!" Then, as if the music had suddenly confirmed our intimacy she placed herself near Mad. d'Albemar and spoke as follows:

"When I knew you ten years ago, M. de Belmont had already loved for some years; but as it was feared he would lose his sight, my relations opposed our marriage. He became entirely blind, and then I threw off all the reserve which prudence had hitherto induced me to keep up

with my own family. Every moment's delay, when I was become so necessary to him, appeared to me insupportable; and as I had neither father nor mother, I conceived I had the right of deciding for myself. I received him unknown to my relations, and for some time I suffered infinite pain in consequence of their threats to annul our marriage! It was, however, ascertained, that this was beyond their power, and they then endeavoured to ruin our fortune, in which they but too well succeeded: but as I had for some time feared they would be able to separate me from M. de Belmont, I was scarce sensible to the loss of our fortune: my imagination was entirely occupied with the misfortune I had avoided.

My husband, continued she, instructed his son, I educated my daughter, and our poverty connecting us more intimately with our children, yielded us new enjoyments when perfectly happy in our affections, those misfortunes which tend by the force of

of circumstances, to draw closer the bonds that unite us, ought to be regarded as the favors of Providence. I would not venture to speak this before M. de Belmont, if I did not know that his blindness does not render him unhappy; but that accident has found him in the bosom of his family, and renders my arm, my voice, and my presence at every moment necessary to him. He saw me in the spring of my youth, and he will always preserve the same recollection of my person. I in my turn can love him, with all the delights, all the enthusiasm of passion, without any fear of the expression of my sentiments being less valued, in consequence of the decay of my charms. I say this before M. de Belmont, Madame, because it is proper he should know what I think of him, since I would not quit him for a moment, not even to have the pleasure of praising him. The greatest happiness a woman can enjoy, is to have for her husband a man whom she respects as much as she loves;

loves; who is superior to her in mind and character, and who decides every thing for her, not because he controls her will, but because he enlightens her reason and supports her weakness. Even in circumstances in which her opinion may differ from his, she yields with pleasure and confidence to him who is responsible for their common destiny, and who can alone repair an error if it should be committed. The intention of nature is not accomplished in marriage, unless the merit of the husband gives him a real advantage over the wife, an advantage which she acknowledges, and of which she is proud. Unhappy are those women who are obliged to be the sole judges of their own conduct, and to conceal the defects and the littlenesses of their husbands, or to emancipate themselves from them, and sustain alone the burthen of existence! the greatest of all pleasures is, that admiration of the heart, which occupies every moment, gives an object to every action, creates a constant incentive to improvement, and above all,

renders

renders dearest to us the true glory and the approbation of him, who honors us by his love. Amiable Delphine, do not estimate the happiness or misery of families, by the advantages they have received from fortune or from nature. Learn the degree of affection with which conjugal love has blessed them, and then only will you be able to ascertain what is their portion of felicity on earth!

"She has not told you all, my kind friend," said M. de Belmont, "she has spoken of the pleasure he has received from the exercise of the most unexampled generosity. She sacrificed every thing for me, who had no prospect to offer her but a series of unfortunate days, during which still great sacrifices were necessary. Rich, young, and beautiful, she devoted her life to a blind man who was not only destitute of fortune himself, but made her be deprived of that which she possessed. Among the treasures of heaven, there existed an inestimable blessing, and it has been bestowed

bestowed on me to compensate for an evil which many unhappy beings have been condemned to suffer without any consolation. An ardent and pure affection has the power of converting the real misfortunes of life into enjoyments. It affords me pleasure to reflect that I cannot move a step, unassisted by the arm of my wife, and that I should even be incapable of taking nourishment, if she did not put into my hands the aliments she intends for me. No new idea would enliven my imagination, if she did not read to me the works with which I wish to be made acquainted. Every thought that reaches my mind, receives a charm from her voice: all my moral feelings arrive to me through her, and take their character from her. Providence gave me life, but left to her the care of completing that present, which would be useless and painful to me, without her assistance.

I believe, continued M. de Belmont, I love with more ardour than any other

man, for all my being is concentrated in the sentiment; but how does it happen that all men do not seek for happiness in their own families? I am persuaded, indeed, that no woman but my wife, could have rendered the marriage state so delightful. I regret, however, that I never can see my children, but I am convinced they resemble their mother. Of all the images which my eyes formerly collected, only one has remained perfectly distinct in my memory, and that is the figure of my wife. Her features are so strongly impressed upon my mind, that I can scarce think myself blind when beside her. Have you observed how sweet her voice is? When she speaks, her accents are always soft and graceful, because she wishes to prolong the pleasures I still possess. I feel all, I forgot nothing; the touch of her hand, the tones of her voice never can be effaced from my recollection. Ah! how happy is that state of existence in which we can thus avow all the affections, and their charms!

charms! To enjoy it without experiencing any of those inconstancies of the heart, which are sometimes the offspring of the splendors of fortune, or the brilliant gifts of nature.

Though my situation cannot be compared with that of any other person, I would declare to the grandees of the earth, to the beautiful and the young, that there is no happiness in life except in marriage, in the affection of children, which never is perfect except when their mother is beloved and cherished. Men, possessing more freedom of action than women, think they can easily find substitutes for domestic enjoyments; but I know not what secret force Providence has given to moral sentiment; the circumstances of life appear independent of its power, and yet it alone ultimately regulates them. No connections out of marriage are lasting: terrible events, or natural disgusts, break those bonds which were thought the most solid. Opinion pursues you, opinion in

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some manner or other always insinuates a poison into your happiness: and were it possible to escape from its empire, can the pleasure of meeting occasionally for a few hours in public circles, be compared with the happiness arising from the perfect intimacy of marriage? What would have become of me had I not been blest by that state? I could only transfer my cares to one who was too proud to share them. How should I have been able to struggle against the order of society? I whom nature has disarmed. How necessary was the protection of constant and solid virtues to me, since I could acquire nothing myself, and could only hope for the happiness which sought me. But it is not merely consolation I possess; I enjoy felicity itself; and I repeat it with confidence, that he who is not made happy by marriage is a solitary being, he is alone in the world, for he is condemned sooner or later to live without being loved.

M. de Belmont pronounced these last words with so much warmth, that they produced

produced a violent sensation in my soul. I confess to you that when any circumstance revives in my mind my sorrow for not having espoused Mad. d'Albemar, I am thrown into a state resembling that which the ancients supposed to result from the vengeance of the furies. That sorrow sometimes slumbers in my bosom; but, when it is awakened, I feel that it never had left me, and all the events which are passed are retraced with the most painful regret.

Mad. d'Albemar soon perceived in me the impetuous and tormenting force of this recollection. I had, indeed, long resisted it; but so many irritations of the same wound, had at last rendered it too painful to be endured. Delphine rose, and said she must go away. As the sky threatened snow, M. and Mad. de Belmont wished to prevail on her to stop. She looked at me; and, I believe, observed that my countenance was entirely discomposed; for she repeated decisively that her

carriage

carriage waited for her a few yards from the house, and that she must go. She promised to return. M. and Mad. de Belmont and their two children accompanied her to the door, with that affection she always excites in all those who are capable of estimating her character.

I gave her my arm without saying a word, and in that way we walked along for some time. Her carriage was not to be found at the place where it was to have waited for us; our orders had been misunderstood; and the snow began to fall in great abundance. "I am cold," said she. These words awaked me from the reverie in which I was absorbed. Looking at her, I saw she was very pale, and feared lest her health should be injured by the distance we still had to walk. I begged of her to permit me to carry her, in order that her feet at least might be kept out of the snow. At first she refused; but her situation becoming more alarming, I insisted, perhaps with some roughness; for I was agitated

tated by the most painful sentiments: Delphine then yielded to my desire. I thought I perceived that she hoped my tormenting sensations would be mitigated by the pleasure of rendering her this trifling service.

I carried her, my friend, for half a league, experiencing emotions so powerful and various, that my whole soul was convulsed; agitated sometimes by the fervor of love, I pressed her to my bosom, and declared that she must be my spouse, my mistress, the being whose life must be united with mine. She repulsed me, sighed, and threatened to refuse my assistance. At one time, the severity of the cold was so great, that her head reclined upon me. I carried her along as if she had been lifeless. I looked up to heaven with inexpressible emotion: I know not what was my wish; but, had she died in my arms, I should have followed her, and should no longer have felt the pain which pursues me. At last we arrived, and my

cares completely revived her. I was impatient to leave her. I no longer found pleasure in Bellerive, in those scenes which formed my delight. Wretch that I am, why did I behold the spectacle of so happy a union!

Blind, ruined, and shut up in a corner, they are rendered happy by love in marriage! yet I, who am capable of enjoying that blessing in the midst of every kind of human prosperity, have delivered up my heart to the most cruel torments, which never will leave me but with my life.

LETTER XX.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

YESTERDAY you did not continue with me more than a quarter of an hour. You scarcely spoke to me, and at your departure I saw that you took the road to the forest instead of returning to Paris. I have since learned that you did not return to your house till morning. You passed that frosty night alone on horseback not far from my house; but it was you who wished to abridge our conversation in the evening. Distressed and uneasy I continued at my window during the whole night. Leonce, thus occupied with each other, we fear to disclose our feelings. What is it you conceal from me? Just heaven! are we no longer able to understand each other.

LETTER

LETTER XXI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

I HAVE passed a night far more sweet than the days that are allotted to me. The sadness of winter pleased me, and I had no reproaches to utter against nature.

But you, you who see my retreat, now do you deign to regard my sufferings with compassion? The shivering cold, which the tedious hour of the night made me experience, was pleasing to me; is it not thus that death is announced to us; and do you not perceive that ere long it will be necessary to fly to it as my only relief from the ills of life. You ask me if I conceal any thing from you; does love admit of any secrets. If you possess the same feelings which hold dominion over my heart, can

can you fail fully to comprehend all my wishes and my thoughts? But since you ask me what is the secret I conceal from you, I will tell you what it is—it is that I am unhappy. Ask nothing more from me.

LETTER XXII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

YOU are unhappy Leonce; ah! it was the inspiration of heaven which bade me depart; which bade me refuse to listen to your oaths. You vowed to me that my stay would satisfy every wish of your heart. By this hope you seduced me, and now you no longer fear to deprive me of it. Formerly the same sentiments gave us delight; but now, alas! what has become of that delightful union of feelings and thoughts. Do you know what I experienced?

rienced? Our situation afforded me the utmost delight. Infatuated, that I was! I was happy, and I wished to tell you so. Oh! how have you repressed this imprudent confidence.

But whence, Leonce, does this unhappy difference between us proceed. Do you imagine that you possess the right of telling me, that you are more susceptible of affection, than I am? With what disdain should I receive that reproach? I know sacrifices which you have not courage to make for me! there is not a single sacrifice in life, which would even deserve your gratitude, so little would it cost me. Have I spoken to you of the injury which my stay at Bellerive has done me? Far from being alarmed at the sufferings to which my love may expose me, I delight to think of imaginary dangers and misfortunes, which with transport I would brave for you.

Will you dare to pretend that the gift, or rather the degradation of myself, is the

sacrifice which I owe to him whom I love? My friend, it would be our love which I would offer up, if I renounced that generous enthusiasm which animates our mutual affection. By yielding to your desire, we should henceforth be nothing but lovers without passion, because we should be without virtue; and thus we would dispel the enchantment which govern the feelings of our hearts.

If I should fail in the last duties which I still continue to respect, what would my conduct appear in my own eyes? I should see myself condemned to pass my life in solitude with the man whom I love, with the husband of another. There I would continue without a struggle, and without remorse. Of my own accord I should have rushed into guilt, and been covered with shame! O Leonce! already I am but too culpable, and do you wish to degrade the image of Delphine? Do you wish to degrade me in your esteem? Let her go, and the remembrance of her

will

will never be effaced—let her die, and you will shed tears over her tomb. But if you render her criminal, in vain will you seek to find her, what she now is. In society, in your memory, nay even in your heart, I shall cease to have an existence, and her humbled head will bend to the earth, no longer daring to look up to heaven, or to Leonce.

Yesterday were you not in the wrong when you reproached me with being insensible to the force of love: your accent was plaintive and melancholy; you accused me of being ignorant of what it was to possess ardent affection. Ah! do you believe that my love is without its delights and its transports. Passion, which is founded on innocence has pleasures which your heart profanes. Before you had begun to disturb the delightful hopes which I indulged, while I flattered myself with the prospect of passing with you the whole of life, there was not even in imagination, a happiness equal to mine. No chagrin, no uneasiness embittered

embittered my days, which brought with them only an increase of happiness. I felt myself carried through life as upon a cloud. Scarcely did I touch the earth with my feet, I was surrounded with an azure sky, through which every object had a smiling aspect. If I had my eyes even gently sufficed with tears at every word that I directed to you. In performing any piece of music, I was melted into tenderness, for I even addressed to you that mysterious language, those undescribable feelings which we derive from sympathy. I had within me a supernatural existence which you had conferred on me: I felt an inspiration of love and virtue, which made my heart beat with more emotion to every impulse of joy.

I was happy even in your absence: the hour when I was to see you approached, and I was agitated by the feverish feelings of hope. This fever was calmed the moment you entered my chamber. It gave place to the delicious sentiments which

arose in my soul: I regarded you; I considered anew all the objects which surrounded me; overcome with the magic, with the enchantment of your presence, and asking heaven whether such happiness was really enjoyed on earth, or whether I had quitted the regions of mortality. Was there not love in all this delirium of enjoyment? And when you folded me in your arms, when I reclined my head on your shoulder, if I concealed in my heart any of my emotions, the heart became more tender. It would have lost even sensibility if I had not known how to restrain its force. I have wished, Léonce, never to see any thing in your pains, but your anxiety about my attachment to you. I have dispelled these anxieties. If you still continue to indulge in the same complaints, it will no longer be worthy of my character, to pay any attention to them.

LETTER XXIII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

MY will is submitted to your's, but I know not what load of sorrow alters in me the principles of life. Yesterday when returning from your house, I could with difficulty support myself on my horse. I shall endeavour to be at Bellerive this evening, but now I have hardly strength to write. Adieu.

LETTER

LETTER XXIV.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

LEONCE, I believe, you are generous; why, then, should I conceal from you what is dangerous for me? You know, you ought to know that, if you rendered me criminal, I could not survive my infamy; and you know me well enough to entertain an idea that I imitate the conduct of those deceitful women who yield after a long resistance. If you do not wish that I should die of grief and shame, I ought, while I disclose to you the secret of my weakness, to look up to you as the protector of my virtue. Oh, Leonce, if you suffer, if your sufferings sometimes impair your health, do not, I beseech you, appear before me in that situation.

Yesterday, when I saw you pale and trembling, I felt my heart sink within me;

as often as the image of your danger presented itself before me, every other idea disappeared. Yesterday I felt in my heart an indiscribable emotion which weakened my reason and my virtue ; which deprived me of all strength. I experienced an inexpressible desire to re-animate your life, at the expense of mine, to pour out my blood, that your's might be warmed, and that my last breath might infuse some heat into your trembling hands.

Leonce, while I avow to you the empire of your sufferings over my heart, it is to intreat of you never to suffer me to be a witness of them. Keep them from my sight, if it is possible. This prayer comes not from an unfeeling heart, and to address it to you is to give you the strongest proof of my esteem. Do not answer this letter. While I write, I feel my face covered with blushes. I have implored your protection. Protect me without putting me in mind that I have requested your support.

LETTER XXV.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

DELPHINE, I respect, and yield to, your will. This resignation is all that I can promise to you. You know not the feelings which agitate me. I impose silence on them, I cannot confide them to you. I adore you, I am afraid to speak to you of love. What then is to become of me? You also love me, and you wish that I should be happy! I believed I should be happy; I was deceived. Let us endeavour no longer to speak of each other; let us endeavour to transport our thoughts to I know not what foreign subject, on which, by some effort, we may be enabled to employ ourselves. For I allow, that to converse on such a subject, will require some effort. Cannot I resist my inclinations? Cannot I give myself up to what

I approve? If I pass another day in that situation, into which my desires and my regrets have plunged me: if I live another day in that situation, one of us is undone.

LETTER XXVI.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

MAD. de Mondeville's steward has called on mine, to speak to him of the sixty thousand livres, for the payment of which I was bound for Madam de Vernon, and forty thousand more which I had lent her for a few months. You know well enough that I do not wish you to discharge these debts, more especially at present, when your affairs are in disorder; but it would be highly unsuitable for me to have the air of doing a service to Mad. de

Mondeville. Alas! I have been guilty of injuries to her; and if ever she discovers them, I am extremely unwilling that she should imagine that I wished to soothe her resentment by obligations of that nature. Have the goodness, therefore, to tell Mad. de Mondeville, that I do not wish for ten years, that there should be any settlement of the debts which her mother contracted with me; but persuade her that I am influenced by friendship for you, by regard for a promise I made to her mother. Suppose whatever you please; but only arrange every thing so that Madam de Mondeville may not believe herself personally bound to me by the ties of gratitude.

LETTER

LETTER XXVII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

I HAVE executed your orders faithfully respecting Mad. de Mondeville. Why do you speak of avoiding gratitude? Have you then forgotten that it is to you that she owes her dowry? that, without your fatal generosity, I should perhaps have been free? O God! can I banish this tormenting recollection, when every thing in life so forcibly brings it back to my thoughts?

I have not been able to prevent Matilda from going to see you to-morrow. She is much affected by your kindness to us; though, according to your desire, I have endeavoured to diminish its merit. She wished me to accompany her to Bellerive; but that is impossible. I do not wish to see you together; I do not wish to find

her

her in the place which you inhabit. I should imagine that her image continued there. Suffer me to request of you, Delphine, to receive Matilda as you would have done before the death of her mother. You are likely to feel unnecessary emotion in her presence, as if you had really injured her. Alas! offer her my sufferings as a sacrifice. Are not these a sufficient sacrifice? preserve, with her, the superiority which belongs to you. It will be sufficient to give birth in her mind to suspicion. Never was she more calm or more happy; but the only person whom she observes with care is you; not from jealousy, but to confirm herself in the opinion that there is no happiness but in devotion; and that whatever is amiable and fascinating in your nature, is useless; because you do not entertain opinions similar to her own. Discover to her therefore, I beseech you, neither sadness nor timidity; and consider that to you, and you alone, she owes the manner in which she is treated by me.

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There is nothing about her which I am particularly disposed to blame; but her character so little corresponds with mine, that I should have sought pretexts to withdraw from her, if you had not made some degree of attention to her happiness the condition of your presence. This happiness she enjoys from me, thank heaven! without compelling me to adopt the least dissimulation. She attends to nothing in life but external actions; as, in religion, she respects nothing but observances. She never renders herself uneasy about the accent, or the words which are a thousand times more involuntary than actions. She loves me, I believe; and, if certain striking circumstances excited her jealousy, I believe she would experience the bitterest affliction: but, while I never fail to see her every day, she never can imagine that my heart is engaged by another. Her repose, as well as your own dignity, my dear Delphine, therefore requires that you should make no change in

your

your usual mode of intercourse with her. Adieu; you triumph: how can I sufficiently restrain myself? I speak as if my heart were calm. . . . Delphine, alas! a day will come, when, should all these efforts prove vain, it will be necessary to choose between life and love: ah! what sentence would you then pronounce?

LETTER XXVIII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

WHAT cruel moments have I passed. Matilda came here at six in the evening, and did not leave me till nine. I believe she had before hand allotted these three hours to this visit, but they were painful beyond any thing of which I can form an idea. I dreaded hypocrisy in testifying friendship to her. I knew it was imprudent and unjust to treat her with coldness, and

and yet each word I pronounced was the result both of deliberation and doubt. I could not at the same time avoid observing and comparing her with myself; and I was dissatisfied with different impressions, alternately made by the beauty she possesses, and the graces she wants; but the friendship of our infancy at last prevailed with me. I felt myself melted into tenderness by her presence, though she had done nothing to excite that feeling.

She enquired respecting my designs, and I told her that I should return in the spring to Languedoc. It was impossible for me to reply to her otherwise; I know not how I happened to make this answer, when no preceding reflection had suggested such a design.

Matilda testified more interest towards me, than ever I observed in her conduct before. I felt so much from her kindness, that had it belonged to her character to express herself with more sensibility, I should perhaps have thrown myself at her feet by a

spon-

spontaneous movement, which neither my will nor my reason could control. But you know her manner: she checks confidence, by obliging others to repress their feelings as she represses her own. The only moment in which she displayed any animation, and abandoned the uniform and precise manner she always preserves, was when she spoke to me of you. All my happiness is placed in him, said she, I have no other affection on this earth.——These words affected me greatly, and my eyes were filled with tears: but then Matilda dreading, like her mother, every thing that may lead to emotion, rose suddenly and asked some questions respecting the arrangements of my house.

From this moment we talked only on the most indifferent subjects, and we separated after three hours earnest discourse, as if we had only conversed for some minutes in the midst of a numerous circle. During that time however, she was calm, but how different was my situation. I was afraid to be alone after her departure.

Is it possible for me not to perceive in the torments I endure, the cruel symptoms of self-disapprobation!

This morning, I received a letter from Mad. d'Ervins, which announces her arrival in a month, and speaks with esteem and confidence of the satisfaction she feels in entrusting me with the education of her daughter. Tell me my friend, can I accept such a charge? What sort of example will I now have before her in my house? How shall I be able to convince her of my innocence, when I must above all things advise her not to imitate my conduct? Not one woman in a thousand could escape the seductions to which I expose myself. I am not yet criminal, Leonce, but I already blush when I hear the names of women mentioned, who are. I experience a blameable pleasure, when I hear of some traits of weakness of the heart in others. I sometimes detect myself in a wish to believe that virtue no longer exists. Formerly I was consistent with myself, now I constantly reason with myself, as if I had some

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one to convince. When I ask myself, to whom I address these repeated discourses, I feel that I wished to drown the voice of my conscience.

If I persist long in this situation my friend, I shall blunt in my heart that pure and lively delicacy, the slightest intimations from which, used always to determine my conduct. What interest can I place in the remains of moral rectitude I still preserve, if I allow the feelings of my soul to become dead, in consequence of my ceasing to aspire to that perfect virtue, which has hitherto always been the object of my most ardent hope? Leonce, I love you to idolatry: when I see you, I fancy myself transported into a world of ideal felicity, and yet I wish I had the resolution to separate myself from you. I have wished to make this heroic sacrifice to morality, and to the Supreme Being; I was desirous that the recollections and the love, with which those have inspired me, should be for ever engraven on a soul, rendered sublime

lime by the most noble example of courage!

Oh! my friend, why do you not join with me in these generous emotions! One day holding each other by the hand, we shall present ourselves with confidence before the Creator of nature. The just man struggling with adversity, has been pronounced a spectacle worthy of heaven; sensible beings triumphing over love, merit still more the approbation of the Deity! Aid me, dear Leonce, I may again become myself, but if you persist, I shall soon be nothing more than a character borne down by the weight of repentance, a gentle soul, but one of a common cast: and the most noble power of the heart, that of making sacrifices, will in me, be for ever infeebled.

In short, I know not whether I ought not to separate from you, even on your own account? Have you not for some time been cruelly agitated; Can I, alas! can I even say that it is for your happiness, that your unfortunate Delphine degrades her heart, by stifling her remorse?

LETTER XXIX.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

THE trouble in which sentiments too powerful to be resisted have involved me, perhaps, merited the letter you have written; but I did not expect it. I spoke to you of what was wanting to my happiness, and you propose to separate from me! How faint then must be the idea I have given you of my love! Has it been possible for you to imagine that I could exist for a moment after you were lost to me! I know not whether you ought to experience the regret and remorse which agitate you; I ask nothing, I require nothing; but I merely wish, that you should read my feelings in my soul. No human power, no order or yours, could induce me to support life, if I ceased to see you. It is for your to consider what that life is worth, and what interests you will prefer to it! I shall not

not murmur against your decision, if you clearly understand what you pronounce.

In the midst of the happiness I enjoy from your presence, I constantly feel that sorrow is nor far distant from me, and that it may perhaps penetrate my soul with a force which will be the greater in consequence of the happy moments by which it has been suspended.

Delphine, I am twenty-five, and I already begin to view the future period of my life as a long perspective, the colours of which must fade in proportion as it is advanced. Is it your wish I should renounce it? I shall obey you without reluctance, but never speak to me of separation. Say to me, *I believe thy death necessary*, my heart will not revolt at the determination; but I shall always experience a sort of irritation against you when you speak of your never seeing me more, as a possible state of existence.

I was wrong, my love, to speak to you of my anxieties; pardon my distraction. By

By presenting a horrible idea to my mind you have made me feel how foolish I was to complain! Alas! is it then only through sorrow that reason can enter the heart of man? Is it grief alone that can teach us to reproach ourselves for too ambitious desires?—Well!—Well!—Speak no more of absence, and I shall be satisfied.

Can I ever forget the pleasure I enjoy in entrusting you with my most secret thoughts? Let us regard together the events of the world, as strangers taking a distant view, and sufficient for each other; every thing beyond ourselves will form only subjects for observation. Ah! Delphine, I would with thee accept immortality on this earth. The generations which shall succeed us, will only fill my soul with a melancholy, but pleasing, sadness. I will continually renew with you my feeling and my sentiments; I will enjoy a new life from every interview.

My friend, let us eradicate from our minds every anxiety to which our imagination might give birth. In the world there is nothing real but love! Every thing else disappears, or changes its form and importance according to the particular disposition of our mind; but violence cannot be offered to the feelings of love, without offering violence to life itself. It regulates, it inspires every interest, and every action. The soul which it fills knows not what path to pursue, and all idea of the divisions of time being lost, every hour no longer presents to him any employment, object, or enjoyment.

Believe me, Delphine, there is in love a certain portion of virtue; there is virtue in that sacrifice of one's self to a lover, which you so strongly condemn; but how can you believe yourself culpable; you whose actions and heart are guided by the purest innocence. How can you blush for yourself when I am penetrated with such profound admiration for your character and

conduct.

conduct. Judge of your virtues as if your charms by the love which I feel for you. It is not your beauty alone which has excited it; your moral perfections have inspired me with that enthusiasm which alternately inflames and combats my desires. Oh! my friend, abjure your letter, be proud of being beloved, and do not repent of devoting your life to me.

LETTER XXX.

DELPHINE TO MAD[LLE] D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, April 2, 1791.

YOU write to me seldom, my dear Louisa, and you avoid speaking of Leonce. Affection breathes as usual in your letters, but they disclose a secret sentiment of blame. Ah! your are just, I have merited that blame. I have lost the moment for a conscious sacrifice. You will judge yourself

self whether it is now possible. I send you the last letter I received from Leonce. Can I leave him after such dreadful menaces. I know that every woman in love supposes she is in a situation which never before existed; but notwithstanding, are you not convinced that the sentiment Leonce entertains for me, is unexampled in the world!

That profound tenderness in so strong a mind, that neglect of every distinction in a character which seemed to consider it a duty to prosecute with ardor the honors of life, are circumstances which must have long since, struck you. What man was ever better calculated to aspire to every species of glory? The nobleness of his expressions, the dignity of his attentions, so excite my admiration, that I often delight to feel that I am inferior to him. No triumph ever afforded me so much enjoyment, as I have experienced in humbling my character before that of Leonce! who can estimate all, that he is

already,

already, and all that he may yet become? I still suspect that there exists beyond the perfections I admire, others of which I am ignorant; and when he employs the most ardent expressions, the dignity of his manner, the slight reserve that appears in his accent, persuades me that, still remain in his heart, sentiments more profound, than those he allows himself to utter. Leonce possesses over me an all powerful influence, arising at once from his mind, his character, and his love. It seems to me, that I am as much born to obey, as to adore him. I merely reproach myself for the passion with which he inspires me; but when in his presence, the involuntary emotion of my soul, is to believe myself criminal, if I cannot render him happy, his looks, his voice, his words, all seem to bear the stamp of virtue, and to dictate to me her laws. When he speaks to me, I fancy I experience that pleasure which the heart enjoys in embracing any generous design; and when

when in a noble transport, he tells me that he must sacrifice his life to love, I blush for myself, if I do not share his enthusiasm.

Fear not, however, that his empire over me, should ever render me criminal. The same sentiment which subjects me to his will, protects me against shame. No! Leonce commands my destiny, because I admire his character, and because he unites all the virtues which you have taught me to cherish, I cannot leave him, if he himself does not consent to that sacrifice; but, when forgetting the difference of our duties, he would make me fail in mine, I am even with his own qualities to oppose him, and certain that he never will sacrifice his honor to his love, the desire of equalling him, inspires me with the courage to resist him. Doubtless, Louisa, there is little to boast of in preserving a last virtue, when so many duties have already been braved, which formerly appeared to me as sacred as those

I still

I still respect. But do not continue this cruel silence respecting my situation. Do not allow yourself to believe that the time is past for giving me advice, or that I am past receiving any! I shall follow it perhaps some time: I promise nothing, however, but I hope you will always love me.

Alas! our situation may in a moment be completely changed. I shall depart, if Matilda, discovering our sentiments, wishes that I should remove; I shall depart, if Leonce ceases for a day to respect me; or if opinions should so far pursue me, as to render him unhappy: Ah! in how many ways foreseen or unforeseen may the happiness I only tremblingly enjoy be torn from me? Be not in haste, then Louisa, to exhibit to me that tone of coldness and reserve which ought only to be assumed towards too prosperous friends. Forget not compassion, I shall perhaps soon have to ask it of you.

You have already given me much uneasiness, by informing me that M. de Valorbe is coming to Paris, in consequence of the death of his mother. I ought then to make known to Leonce, both his sentiments for me and his claims to my gratitude; but, in whatever manner I must make this communication, his presence will always be disagreeable to Leonce. Cannot you, then, divert M. de Valorbe from his intention of coming here? You know that, under the form of timidity and constraint, he conceals a character of severe and sombre self-love; and that all he says respecting his disgust of life, arises from his having an opinion of himself which he cannot make others adopt. He has more understanding than he is capable of displaying, and that is precisely the reverse of the character which is necessary for succeeding in Paris, where nobody will take time to discover the merit of his neighbour. Though he should not be able to learn my real sentiments, he would suf-

fer

fer enough from the superiority of Leonce to irritate him; and it is not easy to foresee what misfortunes might thence arise! Try to persuade him, my dear Louisa, that nothing can ever induce me to marry again. I cannot sufficiently express to you the pain I should experience on seeing M. de Valorbe, if I must endure to hear him still speak of his love. Besides, my visitors are now so few, that, by adding M. de Valorbe to the number, I should expose myself to the suspicion of favoring his addresses.

My habitual companions are M. and Mad. de Lebensei; sometimes I see, but less frequently, M. and Mad. de Belmont. The mind of M. de Lebensei pleases me extremely, his conversation becomes every day more agreeable. Neither prejudice nor the spirit of party induce him to adopt any opinion; and he employs his reason only in the examination of every question. The society of a man of this sort promises you always security and interest; you are not

not afraid of entrusting him with your sentiments, because you are certain of finding them either confirmed or rectified on hearing him.

The mind of Mad. de Lebensei is inferior to that of her husband; but, above all, she possesses far less equanimity. Her situation in society renders her unhappy, though she will not avow it even to herself. This uneasiness is much augmented, in consequence of an inquietude which is very natural and very important at the present moment. She is in the last stage of her pregnancy; and she has reason to believe that her grandmother and her aunt, who are both great *devotees*, will not acknowledge her child. She has told me, without explaining herself farther, that she wishes me to do her a favour with her relations, who are also in some degree mine. I shall be happy to comply with her request; for I really wish to do her a service. She is frequently ashamed of her sorrows, and is discontented with her sensibility, the en-

joyments

joyments of which are not capable of making her forget her other pains. She fears least her husband should perceive her chagrin, and assumes an air of gaiety every time he looks at her. Mad. de Belmont, with a blind and ruined husband, enjoys a far more pure state of felicity: she lives no longer in the world than Mad. de Lebensei, but she does not feel herself detached from it. Solitude is her choice; but poor Eliza is condemned to it. I complain of her, because she gives way to regret; for, in her situation, I should be perfectly happy. She believes, and justly believes, that she is innocent. She has espoused him she loves, and yet the opinion of others torment her—What weakness!

Adieu, dear sister; do not abandon me. Let us resume our habit of daily correspondence. I do not entertain a sentiment which I would not communicate to you, and which your tender and indulgent heart may not in confidence accept.

LETTER XXXI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

THE nephew of Mad. du Marset, is menaced with the loss of his regiment, for having, it is said, made a declaration of his sentiments in opposition to the revolution. M. de Lebensei has much interest with the democratic deputies of the Constituent Assembly; and Mad. du Marset has requested me to beg that you will prevail on him to use his influence in favor of her relation. If M. d'Orsan lose his regiment, he will be disappointed of a rich marriage, which in the present situation of his fortune, is indispensibly necessary to him. I know what the conduct of Mad. du Marset has been, both towards you and me; but I am well pleased to give you an

an opportunity of a vengeance sufficiently satisfactory to offended dignity; for it is not merely from motives of bounty that we serve those of whose conduct we have reason to complain. We enjoy their humiliation when they solicit; and there is a pleasure in acquiring the right of despising those who have excited our resentment: but that reason is not the only one which makes me desire that you should do this service for Mad. du Marset.

You know, though we seldom speak on the subject of the violence of the present political disputes, it has frequently been asserted, and Mad. du Marset has greatly contributed to circulate the report, that you are enthusiastically attached to the principles of the French revolution. It seems to me, therefore, that it is peculiarly proper you should render yourself useful to its enemies: such conduct would contradict all that has been said against you in that respect. On looking at the course of political events in France, I every day more

more anxiously wish that you may not be suspected of interesting yourself in the success of those who direct them.

You require that I shall accompany Matilda to Mondeville. I would have sooner obtained from her than from you, permission to dispense with the journey. Do you know that it will detain me more than a week? Have you reflected how much it will cost me to obey you? All the torments of absence forgotten for three months are again brought to my recollection. I beg of you to be faithful to your promise of writing punctually. I know before-hand, the days that await me. They will be without object and without hope, if I receive not a letter from you. Shakespeare has said

> Life is as dull as a twice told dream.

Ah! how true is this of the days that are past in the absence of Delphine: how disgusting is the return of the same dulness and the same regrets.

Adieu,

Adieu, my love: I am in a state of profound melancholy: When I ask myself the cause of this melancholy, I feel it proceeds from the conviction that these eight days veil from me the rest of futurity. You have ventured to think of leaving me; speak no more of such a purpose: I hope you have never seriously entertained the idea. You have made use of it to alarm me respecting my wanderings, and perhaps you have succeeded. Adieu.

LETTER XXXII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

M. DE LEBENSEI settled the affair of M. d'Orsan in a few hours after he received my letter: you may, my dear Leonce, inform Mad. du Marset of this. I have no desire in the world to take any merit in the

the transaction with respect to her, for if I did it would be usurped. I have served her because you desired it, and not on account of the motives which you recommended to me. Doubtless, I think with you, that it is proper, if we have it in our power to be useful to our enemies; but as the means of individuals are very limitted, I never think of doing good to my enemies until I am certain that none of my friends want my services. To condemn to gratitude, persons against whom we have just reason to complain, is a pleasure which belongs to self-love! but the enjoyments of pride can never be reckoned among the number of good actions.

As to the interest I might have in gaining the affection of those who differ with me in opinion, that is an advantage I set no value on, except with regard to you. I detest the animosities of party; I am incapable of them, and though I ardently and sincerely love liberty, I have not given way to that enthusiasm, because it would

would have carried me into the midst of passions in which a woman ought not to be involved. But as I never can disavow my opinions, I could not avoid experiencing more reluctance than pleasure, in the performance of any service, which might have the air of an expiation: besides, this endeavour never would obtain its object, whenever a calculation has any share in a generous action, the calculation is certain to fail.

I shall transcribe a passage, on this subject, from M. de Lebensei's letter, in answer to mine:—" We ought to do all in our power " to diminish the numberless misfortunes " which a revolution produces, and which " are most severely felt by those who op- " pose it; but in general, little reliance is " to be placed on the gratitude of such " persons. Two months ago I took a " great deal of trouble to relieve from " prison, a man whom I knew not, but who " nearly lost his life for a political offence, " of which he was accused. I learned " yesterday

"yesterday that he has every where repre-
"sented me as a man whose activity is of
"a very dangerous nature. I have re-
"quested one of my friends to remind him
"that if it had not been for this pretended
"activity, he would not now have been in
"existence, and that it ought therefore to
"meet at least with some indulgence from
"him. Such a disappointment, however,
"is of little importance to me, for I am
"equally indifferent as to what those I do
"not love, either say or think of me. I only
"mention the circumstance to shew you
"that a party man is ingenious in discover-
"ing reasons for hating any person of a dif-
"ferent opinion, to whom he may have been
"obliged; and perhaps it often happens
"that, to relieve himself from a trouble-
"some feeling of gratitude, he invents a
"thousand calumnies which he never
"would have thought of had the parties
"remained altogether strangers to each
"other." M. de Lebensei goes, perhaps, a little too far, in expressing himself thus,

but

but I wished you should understand, dear Leonce, that I have served Mad. du Morset to please you, and without any other motive of interest. It appears to me, that M. de Lebensei paid great respect to your name in this affair. I believe he would be very happy to form an intimacy with you; when you return, shall I bring you together by an invitation to dine with me?

You see, my friend, this letter is altogether on the business in which you engaged me for Mad. du Marset: I should have wished, however, to have said a few words on the pain I suffer from your absence. When I have to pass the close of the day alone on the spot where I used to enjoy the happiness of seeing you, I become a prey to the most cruel reflections. Alas! those who have no reason to reproach themselves, may calmly support a temporary separation, but when dissatisfied with ourselves, the illusion which overcomes that feeling, can only be created in the

the presence of him we love. Take care, however, not to afflict Matilda by returning before her. Consider that to calm my remorse, it is necessary that I should be constantly able to say to myself that my sentiments do not injure her, and that even at my solicitation you often render attentions, which, perhaps, were it not for me, you would neglect.

LETTER XXXIII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Mondeville, April 20.

Before I leave Mondeville, my love, I wish to enter into an explanation with you on part of your letter, for I could not think of devoting any of the moments we pass together, to the discussion of the interests

of

of life. I shall always do what you desire, but, unless you require it, I wish to avoid connecting myself with M. de Lebensei. In consequence of the present events, I may find myself engaged, though with regret in a civil war, and in that case I shall doubtless, join the party which is hostile to that of M. de Lebensei.

I have several times told you, that the political disputes which now prevail, do not excite in me any sensation of anger. My mind has no difficulty in comprehending the motives which may influence the defenders of the revolution; but I do not think it would become a man of my rank, to unite with those who wish to destroy the order of nobles. In associating with them, I should appear either to be their dupe, a character always ridiculous, or to range myself by calculation with the strongest party. and I detest force, even when it supports reason. If I had the misfortune to hold the opinions of the strongest side, I should be silent.

There

There are however, sentiments which must determine my conduct in the present circumstances. I admit, that following my own judgment, I would not have made it a point of honor, to support the privileges of the nobility, but since the heads of the most ancient and distinguished families have decided, that their privileges ought to be maintained: that is sufficient to make me abhor the idea of passing for a democrate; but though in explaining my motives, I could justify myself a thousand times better, I never would admit an explanation to be necessary on any subject connected with my respect for my ancestors, and the duties they have transmitted to me. Were I a man of letters, I should conscientiously endeavour to disclose those philosophical truths, which will perhaps be one day universally acknowledged; but when a man possesses a character, which endures censure with impatience, he ought not to expose himself to be blamed by his contemporaries, or the individuals of the

class to which he belongs. Even the glory which might be bestowed by posterity, would not compensate for such a sacrifice; but there is evidently at this moment, no idea of glory among the partizans of liberty; for the means they employ to attain their object, are so unworthy, that they must prove injurious to the individuals, though they should, which I do not believe, tend to promote their cause.

You love liberty with a generous, and I may even say, romantic feeling, as it is connected with political institutions. Your imagination has decorated these institutions with all those historical recollections which are calculated to produce enthusiasm. You love liberty, as you love poetry, as you love religion, as you love every thing capable of enobling and exalting human nature. Ideas which are generally supposed to be foreign to the character of women, are found perfectly consistent with your amiable nature and sense, when you discover

discover them to be intimately united with the dignity and delicacy of your soul. Still, however, it always gives me pain to hear you mentioned as the friend of the revolution. I think that a woman cannot have too much aristocracy either in her opinions or in the choice of her society; and every thing which tends to create a greater distance between you and others, appears to me more suitable to your sex and your rank. It is also my opinion, that it becomes you best to join the party of those that are victims. Finally, and this of all motives is that which influences me the most, in the class of society in which we live, too many enemies must be made by adopting the political opinions which prevail at present; and I am always afraid that you will suffer from the envy which they excite.

I hope, my dear Delphine, I have not abused the deference with which you so kindly regard me, by this attempt to ad-

vise you? But I feel for you a perfect union of all the sentiments the heart can experience. I would be at once your protector and your lover. I wish at the same time to direct and admire you. I believe myself called upon to conduct through the world, an angel who is not yet perfectly acquainted with the path she ought to pursue, and allows a mortal who adores her to guide her steps far from those earthly snares which are unknown in the heaven from which she descended. Adieu, I am already relieved from three days of ten I was condemned to pass at a distance from you.

LETTER XXXIV.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

Bellerive, April 24.

I WISH not to combat your arguments. My respect for your excellent qualities, and even for your faults, forbids me from ever opposing any opinion in which you believe your honor in the slightest degree engaged. But when you pronounce the horrible words *civil war*, can I avoid being profoundly afflicted at the little importance you attach to individual conviction in political questions? You speak of deciding between two parties, as if it were an affair of choice, as if we were not invincibly determined to espouse one or the other by motives of interest, and the feelings of the soul.

I have

I have no destiny but that of pleasing you; I never can have any other. You may, therefore, be certain that I shall carefully avoid manifesting any opinion which you would not wish to see me express: but were I a man, it would be as impossible for me not to love liberty and not to serve it, as to shut my heart against generosity, friendship, and all the most pure and exalted sentiments that honor human nature. It is not merely the lights of philosophy which produce those ideas: there is mingled with them a generous enthusiasm, which, like all noble and dignified passions, when it takes possession of the mind, governs it imperiously. You would have experienced this impression, had not the opinions of your mother and those of the Spanish grandees among whom you lived during your infancy inspired you, for the defence of the order of nobles, with sentiments which you ought, perhaps, to have consecrated to the whole of the nation: but this is

saying enough of your opinions. It is above all important to me to consider your conduct.

What! Leonce could you be capable of drawing your sword against your fellow citizens in favor of a cause in which you feel no enthusiastic interest? I shall urge against you the very objection you make to the party which supports the revolution. *It is the strongest*, you say, *and I would not be suspected of yielding to force*; but do you not also fear that you may be accused of being determined by your personal interest in defending the privileges of the nobles? Believe me whatever opinion you may embrace, its enemies will easily find the means of wounding that feeling you cherish, by the motives they will not fail to ascribe to you, It is necessary, therefore, to regulate our conduct by our own reason and conscience. Do what we may our adversaries will always endeavour to tarnish the lustre of actions springing from the purest of motives. It is above all impossible

sible to conciliate public opinion in our favor, when any species of enthusiasm necessarily divides society into two opposing parties. Every thing proves, as I have often observed to you, that we never can be certain of our conduct or happiness if we depend on the opinions of others. But be that as it may, at present I wish to convince you, that as you are not fully persuaded of the justice of the cause you propose to support; you have no right to shed a single drop of your blood, of that blood which is mine, for an opinion which you may think right; but which no strong conviction has produced in your mind. Your duty, according to your manner of thinking, consists in political inaction, and all my happiness is connected with the fulfilment of that duty. Ah! my friend, renounce those passions which appear factitious, when compared with the only natural emotion which fills the whole soul, and changes, as by a sort of enchantment, all we perceive into a source of delightful

 emotions

emotions! Yield political interests to the power of love. Let us forget the destiny of empires for our own. There is a kind of selfishness which is excuseable in the minds of sensibility. He who concentrates himself in his affections, may, without remorse, detach himself from the rest of the world.

LETTER XXXV.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

Bellerive, April 26th.

My Friend,

I WISH to take no step without consulting you. Alas! I know too well what a contrary conduct has cost me.

Mad. de Lebensei was delivered eight hours ago, of a son. I went to see her this morning, and expected to find her

her in the happiest moment of her life; but the reasons she has for fearing that her family will not acknowledge her child, overwhelm with sorrow the pure enjoyment of maternal love. She proposes to act in a manner at once simple and noble, to go herself to her grandmother and aunt, and lay her child at their feet; but she is desirous that I should accompany her. These old ladies are my relations, and as I have always treated them with the greatest respect and attention, they are well disposed towards me. Mad. de Lebensei trembled while she made this request, and I perceived from the state she was in, that she considered my compliance of the greatest importance. An involuntarily emotion induced me to give my consent. I saw her in anguish, and I could not with-hold consolation. A moment after, however, reflection seemed to suggest to me, that there was a kind of distant resemblance between this hasty resolution and my easy condesension for Theresa. I

 shuddered

shuddered at this recollection, but it was impossible to deprive Mad. de Lebensei of a hope which she entertained so ardently; it was almost become her right; I continued therefore to speak to her of indifferent matter, in order that she might suppose I meditated on the promise I had made. On coming home, however, I resolved to submit this promise to your will. Give me a positive answer on the subject before you return.

I cannot conceal from you, that it will give me infinite pain to appear deficient in generosity towards Mad. de Lebensei, and to lose the esteem of her husband, whom I greatly respect. He has completely terminated in the handsomest manner, the affair of Mad. du Marset, which I recommended to him in your name. To appear cold and selfish, to assume a character so contrary to my natural disposition, is one of the severest sacrifices to which I could condemn myself. To avoid the opportunity of performing an essential service,

vice, of greatly promoting the happiness of another, seems to me the same as rejecting a benefit from heaven. But notwithstanding this, even my sympathy, even that sentiment which I never before repressed, I am ready to emulate to you. If you require me to discontinue my intercourse with M. and Mad. de Lebensei, I shall do it.

How does it happen that you still allow harsh complaints to escape you in your last letter *. Ah! Leonce, shall our happiness continue? I think I see the storm which menaces us, approaching. Would I were dead before it burst on our heads!

* This letter is lost.

LETTER XXXVI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE,

Mondeville, April, 29.

I WOULD not repress the generous emotions of your soul, my love; I trust no evil will result from this affair. I should have been glad that Mad. de Lebensei had not made the request, but since you have given your promise, I think with you that there are no honorable means, by which you can avoid fulfilling it. Adieu, my Delphine! notwithstanding my solicitations, Mad. de Mondeville will not leave this for four days. I therefore shall not be at Bellerive until the fourth of May, at seven o'clock.

LETTER XXXVII.

MAD. DE LEBENSEI TO MAD. D'ALBEMAR.

Cernay, May 2.

YOU have restored me Madame to the happiness, of which I was threatened to be for ever deprived! I could not support the idea of my son not being acknowledged by my family, and to bring about an event I so much desired. I had exhausted all the means, which a character not destitute of spirit would permit to suggest. But you appeared, and every one was instantly changed. Old age, prejudice, embarrassment, arising from a long discord, all yielded to the power of your irresistable eloquence, and the genuine sensibility you displayed. I shall never forget the moment, when throwing yourself on your knees before my grandmother, and present-

ing my infant, she spread her aged hands on the beautiful ringlets which adorn your head, and blessed you as her daughter. Ah! how I wish to see you happy. Will not the prayers of all those whom your generosity has protected, prove at last efficacious?

M. de Lebensei is profoundly grateful for this obligation you have conferred upon us. He never has spoken of you since he knew you, but with the highest admiration. Allow me to tell you, that we never pass a day without mutually regreting that Leonce is the husband of Matilda.

If among the events which the revolution may be expected to produce M. de Mondeville, should, like me, find the means of dissolving so unequal an union, my husband would be very zealous in advising him to such a step! But what signifies our fruitless wishes? They can only prove to you that we feel a lively interest in your fate. Think with kindness Madame of the family at Cerney to

which you have given internal peace: that benefit which would have consoled us for the loss of every other had been ravished from us but for you.

LETTER XXXVIII.

DELPHINE TO MAD[LLE]. D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 5, 1791.

I HAVE enjoyed the pleasure, my dear Louisa, of reconciling Mad. de Lebensei with her family, but this agreeable sentiment is now troubled by one which gives me great uneasiness.

Leonce arrived yesterday morning from Mondeville, and I expected to see him in the course of the day, but at eight o'clock a man on horseback arrived to inform me that he could not come; and also told me that he had left Leonce in a very numerous company

company at Mad. du Marset's: Mad. de Mondeville was not there, and the messenger who came to me was also directed to order his coach to come for him at one in the morning. How could it happen that he should have so easily resolved not to see me after a fortnight's absence? Why has he not written a single word to me? Can he be displeased with my interference in favor of Mad. de Lebensei, though he consented to it, and knows its success?

Louisa, I have already greatly suffered, but if the heart of Leonce becomes indifferent to me, will you who have blamed my conduct, think that Heaven has justly punished me? No—you will not say so. Had I committed the greatest crimes, they would thus be more than expiated. But why those painful fears? May he not have been detained by some business, by some difficulty? Ah! if he begins to calculate on business or on obstacles—If I am no more to him than one of the common interests of life, receiving, like them, his attention

in my turn, I will not, at that rate, submit to the kind of existence, he imposes upon me. It is only by inspiring him with an enthusiastic and impassioned sentiment, that I can raise myself in my own estimation, notwithstanding the blame to which I expose myself, No—if I am reduced to experience only the esteem, the attentions on the moderated affection of Leonce: sorrow and glory of sacrifices is for me the noblest course. I feel, Louisa, that I acquit myself ill in unfolding this idea, and I can, with difficulty, turn my attention to any other.

Mad. d'Ervins says, that she will return to Bellerive in less than three weeks, to resign her daughter to me before she takes the veil. M. de Sorbellane having no longer any hope of inducing her to change her design, has gone to England, where he exists, plunged in the most profound melancholy. Generous, unfortunate man! Oh! Louisa, sometimes I persuade myself that the Supreme Being abandons the

world

world to the wicked, and reserves the immortality of the soul for the just only. The wicked may enjoy some years of pleasure, the virtuous may endure long sufferings; but the prosperity of the former ends in annihilation, and the adversity of the latter conducts them to eternal felicity. Pleasing idea! it would console me for every evil except that of not being loved; for imagination itself could not then form any idea of future happiness.

How much am I affected by the last letter you wrote me! You repeat your pressing request for an account of all the details of my life—of that life which you disapprove, and which continues to retard the moment in which I should join you. Oh! it is you who best know how to love; you who never shew either caprice, prejudice, or neglect; it, indeed, is you. . . . . Alas! shall I already believe that it is no longer to be expected from him!

LETTER

LETTER XXXIX.

MAD. D'ARTENAS TO MAD. D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 5.

IT is really painful to me, my dear Louisa, to find myself always under the necessity of communicating matters which must give you uneasiness; but the delicacy of M. de Mondeville would, perhaps, induce him to conceal from you what passed last night; and it is absolutely necessary you should know it. My niece, who is to dine in the valley of Montmorenci, will deliver my letter this morning, as she passes your gate.

I arrived yesterday at Mad. du Marset's nearly at the same time as Leonce. He came to announce to the mistress of the house, that her nephew would be continued

nued in the command of his regiment. She returned him many thanks, and begged he would spend the evening with her; but he refused.

There is in society a very remarkable resemblance between the females of Paris, who have the greatest influence from their age, their aristocratic notions, or their devotion; and there is not one of them who can free herself from these three great sources of dignity, with the view of appearing amiable. Leonce, I believe, felt a sufficient portion of *ennui* till the short time which he had allotted to this visit had elapsed. He was standing before the chimney, conversing with four or five gentlemen, when your name, pronounced in a low tone of voice among the ladies, attracted his attention. He did not immediately turn round, but he left off talking, that he might listen more attentively, and he heard Mad. du Marset distinctly utter the following words:—" Do you know that Mad. d'Albemar has been in person to present to Mad. de Cernay the little

 bastard

bastard of her grand-daughter, Mad. de Lebensei? a singular employment for a young woman of twenty." M. de Mondeville turned round with a good deal of impetuosity, but instantly checking his warmth to give greater proofs of his contempt, he coolly requested Mad. du Marset to repeat what she had just now said: this request he uttered in a tone of haughtiness and indignation which made Mad. du Marset and those who witnessed the commencement of this affair tremble. Mad. du Marset was disconcerted; Mad. de Tesin, who encourages her in her ill-natured remarks, and whose character possesses much more energy than hers, gave her a look which plainly intimated that she ought to make some reply. On this signal, Mad. du Marset said: "You know well enough, Sir, that Mad. de Lebensei cannot be regarded as lawfully married; thus . . . ."—"I know not," interrupted M. de Mondeville, "on what absurd principles you imagine that a woman, who has divorced

divorced her former husband, according to the established laws of that country where he lived, is not entitled to consider herself free; but this I know, that Mad. d'Albemar's having received Mad. de Lebensei into her society, ought sufficiently to justify you in receiving her as a woman of character, if she were to come into your company."

Mad. du Marset could not defend herself; she grew pale, and with her eyes seemed to look round for support. Mad. de Tesin, with her usual sagacity, perceived that to interest a certain part of the company, in behalf of Mad. du Marset, it was necessary to call in the aid of party spirit.—As for me, said she, what I never can account for is, that Mad. d'Albemar is on an intimate footing with a man who entertains such detestable political opinions, as M. de Lebensei. Mad. du Marset, replied M. de Mondeville, with a good deal of point, knows better than any one else, the reasons which ought

ought to attach her to M. de Lebensei. It is to him, that her nephew M. d'Orsan owes the continuance of the command of his regiment, and it was solely from the request of Mad. d'Albemar, that he interfered in the business, for of Mad. du Marset, he has no sort of knowledge. I have received twenty notes from her, entreating me, to prevail upon me, to ask my cousin, Mad. d'Albemar, to make the application to M. Lebensei. She did so, and she succeeded. While her ineffable goodness is employed in re-uniting a divided family, it is Mad. du Marset who takes upon her to blame the conduct of my cousin. But I have done, said he; it is sufficient for me to have shown to those who hear me, that malicious insinuations, originating in envy and ingratitude, scarcely deserve the notice of a man of honor.

M. de Fierville discovered some degree of shame, at thus witnessing the humiliation of his friend, Mad. du Marset. He had

had several times looked to M. d'Orsan, as if to conjure him to undertake the defence of his aunt, but as he persisted in his silence, M. de Fierville, though seventy years old, could not help saying to Leonce, you will have considerable difficulty, Sir, in succeeding in your object, if you wish to prevent every one from speaking of the numberless imprudencies of Mad. d'Albemar. It will not be enough to impose silence on women.— At these words, Leonce alternately turned red and pale with rage. Unwilling to have any dispute with a person of M. de Fierville's age, he advanced to the middle of the circle, and though he appeared to address himself to M. de Fierville, he fixed his eyes on M. d'Orsan. You are in the right, said he, old men and females have nothing to do on the present occasion, and I only wish that a young man would make the same assertion, which the feebleness of your age permits you to do with impunity. These words

were

were uttered with a turn of the head, expressive of the greatest *fierté*; a profound silence succeeded. This silence every one felt to be embarrassing, but no one had the courage to break it.

M. d'Orsan, though naturally brave, had no desire to fight with Leonce, and probably afterwards with M. Lebensei, in support of the assertions of his aunt. He assumed a vacant air, played with Mad. du Marset's little dog, which alone, in the midst of this scene, had the courage to keep up its usual noise; he approached with eagerness to the party where I was, as if he had been extremely anxious to enjoy my conversation. Mad. de Tesin, greatly exasperated at the triumph of Leonce, got up hastily and walked across the room, for the purpose of speaking to M. d'Orsan. This was done in a manner so remarkable, that every one immediately perceived her object to be to endeavour to prevail upon the nephew of Mad. du Marset to make some answer to

Leonce.

Leonce. A lady who was in conversation with M. d'Orsan, involuntarily stretched out her arms, as if for the purpose of preventing the approach of Mad. de Tesin. She, however, was totally engrossed with this feeling, and taking M. d'Orsan aside, she whispered to him with great earnestness. Leonce, who did not for a moment loose sight of what was going forward turned round to Mad. du Marset, and said to her, with a smile of the most contemptuous sarcasm, "I accept, madam, the invitation you have given me. I shall continue here the remainder of the evening, for I wish to allow time, added he, in a tone of voice considerably louder, to some persons who seem to be deliberating about their plan of operations." He then went out to give some orders to his servants, and in passing by the door he saluted Mad. de Tesin, and M. d'Orsan with an air of disdain which could not fail to give them offence.

During the momentary absence of Leonce, some ladies, resuming that cou-

rage

rage which his presence had overawed, began to talk a little louder, and eagerly said: "you see that *M. de Mondeville loves Mad. d'Albemar; it is clear that he makes a return to her love; she lives at Bellerive only to receive his visits more freely.*" Leonce returned, and they instantly became silent, discovering, at the same time, the most ludicrous dismay. But M. de Mondeville has such an ascendency over every one, that minds not of his cast, are terrified at his anger, even without forming any opinion of the effects which it might produce. He continued, during the remainder of the evening, watching Mad. du Marset, Mad. de Tesin, and M. d'Orsan. In his manner of examining their motions, he excited, at once, attentive observation, and apparent indifference. M. d'Orsan, who had placed himself near our party, offered to join us, and accordingly took his station in that part of the room. Leonce came twice to the table; M. d'Orsan did not speak to him,

and when the game was ended he went away. Leonce soon after followed him.

I remained, because I saw well enough that the friends of Mad. du Marset were preparing to let loose their scandal against you. Mad. de Tesin began by declaring that M. d'Orsan ought to fight M. de Mondeville for insulting his aunt. With a good deal of warmth I took up the conversation, and remarked, that in my opinion nothing was more unsuitable to the female character, than for a women to encourage men to fight duels; there is also, added I, a certain degree of cruelty, of caprice, and want of dignity, in this desire of giving birth to danger, in which one takes no share, in this wish, springing only from pride, of being the cause of a disastrous event. That is true, exclaimed an old officer present, whose bravery was beyond the reach of the slightest suspicion, and who hitherto had not been observed, because he had been asleep behind Mad. du

Marset's chair. He awoke just as I began to speak, and repeating the expresson "that is true," he added, "if a woman obliged me to fight, I should do it; but next day I should endeavour to effect a reconciliation with my opponent, and should break off all connection with her."

Mad. de Tesin did not insist on her opinion, and you may be assured there is no longer any question about a duel, the necessity of which existed only in her own brain. She next began to blame you generally, but in a manner the most perfidious. I combated whatever she said; at length several other ladies joined me, and my old officer, who had never seen you but once, incessantly repeated the warmest eulogiums on your charms.

I have had occasion to remark what a degree of ill humour prevails on every thing connected with politics. Your connection with M. de Lebensie, creates to you more enemies than your love for Leonce, and it is in consequence of your presumed opi-

nions, that your sentiments are scrutinized with the utmost severity. I know well enough that nothing can prevail on you to give up one of your friends; but avoid, at least, every thing which can particularly excite observation; do not perform good offices where they are of such a nature as to be particularly remarkable. At a time when party spirit rages with great violence, a young woman who is the subject of pretty general conversation, is in danger of being exposed to considerable uneasiness, even though the conversation is generally to her advantage. Besides there is nothing existing which is equally good in the eyes of all mankind. When a generous action, if I may use the expression, is forced on you by your situation; when it is a father, a brother, or a husband, whom you have relieved, your conduct will be generally approved. But if the benevolence of your nature draws you beyond your natural circle, the person who is served is gratified for a moment; but every one else indulges per-

manent feelings of jealousy and ill-will, which sooner or later give rise to expressions which may poison the good offices which you have done.

In a word, Leonce is too little master of his passions to listen to any censure passed on your conduct. It is not thus that the cause of friendship is to be best supported. Come to see me to-morrow, I beseech you. I will shut my door against every one else, and we will converse without interruption. It is still time to remedy the ill which may be said of you, but it is absolutely necessary that you should return to the world. The solitary life you lead with Leonce will destroy you. The world is as busy with your character as if you were in the midst of society, and you cannot resist their censures any more than if you lived two hundred leagues from Paris. My dear Delphine, suffer yourself then to be guided by your aged friend. All the knowledge of life is compressed in an old proverb, which

which gossopping women are constantly repeating; if youth "*had knowledge, and age power.*" A great mystery is contained in these few words. You are yourself a proof of it; you are superior to every other person that I know; but your youth prevents your understanding, from governing either your imagination or your conduct. I am anxious to spare you the lessons of experience which are at all times the lessons of sorrow. Adieu my young friend till to-morrow.

LETTER XL.

DELPHINE TO MAD^{LLE} D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 6.

AFTER receiving the enclosed letter of Mad. d'Artenas, my dear Louisa, I expected the arrival of Leonce, with the greatest

greatest emotion. I could not recover from the alarm which the recital of what had passed at Mad. du Marset's had excited. I was affected by the lively interest which Leonce had displayed in my defence, but I felt an indescribable emotion of pain, when I reflected on the importance he had given to my contemptible enemies; and that at the very time he was repelling their attacks, he perhaps had contracted something of an impression unfavorable to my character. These ideas were effaced, the moment he entered my chamber. He was delighted at once more seeing me after an absence of fifteen days. He at first complimented me, with expressions full of enthusiasm on my figure, which he said was embellished with new charms. I felt immediately re-assured. When I spoke to him of the evening of the day before, I saw that he was unhappy; but this unhappiness sprung from motives of generosity to me. "Mad. d'Artenas has informed you of all," said he; "do not think that I in-

I injured you, in the opinion of the world, by speaking too warmly of you." She hopes, replied I, that an imprudence which it would be pleasing to me to pardon, might be repaired, if you had exposed no one but me. "Alas!" replied he, "for a considerable time I have been always in the wrong. My heart is in continual agitation. It is necessary, in your presence, to struggle against the love which consumes me; and I abandon myself, when I am absent from you, to culpable violence of expression. In every thing I do there is nothing which has the appearance of reason, but my continual desire to meet with some circumstance which may deliver me from life." He pronounced these words with an accent so melancholy, that I instantly saw, a cruel scene threatened me. I endeavoured to ward it off by turning the conversation to M. de Lebensei, who had been to see him that morning, to thank him for his conduct at Mad. du Marset's house. These thanks were repeated the same evening. M. de Lebensei,

bensei, twice repeated Leonce, as if that name encreased his uneasiness. I have seen him twice, and he is doubtless, a man of a distinguished character; but I know not by what accident it is, that every thing he said to me, only adds to my sufferings. I asked Leonce the nature of the conversation with M. de Lebensei, but he only related to me half of what passed. It only appeared to me that it was the object of M. de Lebensei to convince him, that opinion ought to be despised when it is unjust. After supporting this position by all the arguments which could be employed by a superior mind, he finished with these remarkable words, which Leonce faithfully repeated to me. "I was for a moment flattered," said he to Leonce, "that the felicity of which you have been deprived, might have been restored. I believed that the constituent assembly of France would establish divorce, and I thought with pleasure that you would profit by it, by putting an end to an union formed

formed by falsehood, and by uniting your lot to the best and most amiable of women. But this project is for a while laid aside, and with it has vanished my hope, at least for some time. I wished to interrupt Leonce, for the purpose of expressing to him the dislike which I should feel to such a proposition, even if it were possible: but at that moment he seized my hands with very lively emotion.—In the name of heaven do not say a word on what I have related to you," exclaimed he, " you cannot conceive what the effect of a single word on this subject would be.—Suffer me to go."

He then descended to the terrace, and walked with precipitation along the walk which borders on my rivulet. I followed him slowly: returning a few steps, he saw me, and fell on his knees before me.—" No," exclaimed he, " I ought not to have quitted you, but to see you again inspires me with too powerful an emotion. Your celestial figure appears to me to

have assumed new charms, which inspire me at once with the most ardent love, and with the deepest affliction. What has passed within the last fifteen days? What passed yesterday? What has M. de Lebensei said to me? What were my sensations in listening to his discourse? "Ah Delphine," said he, resting on my hand, and trembling as he endeavoured to raise himself up; "I wish to die. Come, conduct me to the bank where I may behold the last rays of the sun, where I may gaze on them with you." And he pressed my heart with a transport so affecting, that even angels might have shared it. "Continue then, my dear Delphine," said he, "it is only while you remain there, that I cease to suffer. Ah tell me, what shall become of our love, of the fatality which separates us, of my character. For in the midst of the most violent passion, perhaps it will still pursue me. What will become of us? I might have possessed you; you were not unwilling to become my wife. I might

still be happy if your inflexible heart.— But no, that is not the lot to which I am destined to. I shall behold you calumniated for the sentiment which unites us, and that sentiment imperfect in your soul, will consign me to torments, which know no alleviation and no end. Who will afford me consolation? Has not M. de Lebensei rendered me a thousand times more unhappy? I know not well what I feel; I am oppressed. If I could but enjoy more open air, I should suffer less," and he turned round his head to the side from which the wind proceeded, as if he wished to invite the freshness of the breeze, to calm the ardor of those burning reflections which consumed him.

I took hold of his hand; I sat down beside him, and for some moments he appeared to me more tranquil. It was the first fine evening of the spring that I had seen Leonce, and I experienced the liveliest pleasure. In youth there are moments when, without any new ground of hope, and

and even in the midst of an accumulation of sufferings, on a sudden, agreeable sentiments are experienced, which have no other origin but a gentle and lively feeling of existence. Oh, Leonce, said I, neither that Heaven, nor that nature which surrounds us, nor even my tenderness, can contribute to your happiness. " Nothing," replied he, " nothing can weaken the passion which I feel for you, and this passion, at present, is to me only the source of constant misery. Your eyes which are raised to Heaven, as if to your native abode; your eyes seem to supplicate Heaven to give you strength to resist me. Delphine, in those stars which you contemplate, in those worlds, perhaps, peopled with intelligent beings, if there are any beings who love, they are united in the bonds of indissoluble affection. Neither mankind, society, nor their virtues separate them." Cruel, that you are, exclaimed I, and am I not given to you? Have I a feeling of which you are not the object?

Does

Does my heart beat at the sound of any other name, but yours? Go, replied Leonce, since your love is weaker than duty, or what you believe to be your duty, what is that love? Can it equal or satisfy mine; and he threw me away from him, but with trembling hands, and his eyes bathed in tears. "Delphine," added he, "your presence—your looks—all that delirium—all those charms, which awaken so many regrets, overpower me. Adieu!" and getting up precipitately, he wished to depart.

What, said I, detaining him, do you wish then to leave me? Is it thus that you employ the hours that are left to us? the hours of a life of such short duration to all mankind---alas! perhaps much more limited to us—"yes, you are in the right," said he, returning, "I was infatuated to think of quitting you. I wish to remain; I wish to be happy! Why, then, am I in this distracted state? Why, continued he, putting his hand upon his heart, why do do I experience here so many

many sorrows? Alas! I am not made for life; I feel myself as it were suffocated in its connections. If I knew by what means they could all be dissolved, you would be mine, I would withdraw you from every other. M. de Lebensei, M. de Lebensei! why did you introduce me to this man? Ideas, the most absurd, prevail on this earth—where every thing is under the empire of opinion, that triumphant and disdainful enemy. But these absurd ideas disorder the understanding, and agitate the heart. I am no longer master of myself. I can no longer regulate my destiny. If in a future world we retain the recollection of our feelings, without the cruel affliction which they create; if you believe in an existence like this—oh! my friend, let us hasten to sieze it together. We must break asunder those barriers which separate us, if by life they are consecrated. Speak to me, Delphine, I have need of the sound of your voice—that voice, at once so sweet and so melodious. It calms the

spirits of an unfortunate being, whose heart is torn by the conflicts betwixt his love and his destiny. Come, do not withdraw from me." As he finished these words, he leaned, for support, on a tree, and throwing his arms round me, held me, with a degree of force, which almost alarmed me.

"Do you not feel," said he, "the necessity of blending the feelings of our souls? As long as we continue separate, will you not experience misery? If my arms should quit their hold, would you not experience some grief which would give you a faint idea of what sufferings I endure."

I felt the liveliest motion; I trembled and I made an effort to withdraw from his hold—"You grow pale," said he; "I know not what feelings now occupy your soul; do they correspond with mine?" Delphine, exclaimed he in an accent of despair; "must I live, or is it necessary for me to die?" I was seized with the deepest terror. I wished to withdraw, but the looks, the

words of Leonce, made me afraid of leaving him to himself. At no time have I been able to resist the influence of his sorrow, and at this moment I disregarded the danger, to which his culpable passion exposed me. On a sudden, retracing in my mind what had begun all the misery of this day, I know not what idea inspired me with the resolution of employing means, cruel indeed, but sure, in their operation, of filling him with shame for his weakness.

Leonce, said I to him, in a manner which could not fail to command his attention, what you wish would plunge me in infamy; your pure and innocent enjoyments no longer delight you. You accuse me of not loving you, when my heart is a thousand times more devoted to the tenderest affection than yours. Answer me, solemnly: reflect, that is in the name of heaven and of love, that I ask you. If it were necessary for our union, that like M. and Mad. de Lebensei, you should

brave

brave public opinion, what would be your conduct? Leonce sighed: drew himself back, and was silent for a moment. I availed myself of this moment, and said to him, you have answered me, and yet you ask of me to degrade myself in my own esteem. Cruel, that you are interrupted Leonce, with an expression of fury, of which no language can convey an adequate idea; no, I have not answered: this is a snare which you wished to lay for me. You join stratagem to cruelty, and imitating the conduct of tyrants, you put insidious questions to the victims they have devoted to destruction. This reproach pierced my heart, and I was grieved at the idea of having merited it. Leonce, said I to him, with tenderness, it is not your silence nor your answer, which would make any change in my resolution or your destiny, I do not wish to find in your character, grounds of resistance. Ah! under whatever forms, in which your amiable qualities, or even your faith shall appear, Can I discover any

thing

thing in them but new seductions; but ought I not to remind you. What yoke necessity has equally subjected both of us? this necessity is duty, it is virtue, it is all that is most sacred in this world. Leonce, listen to me, God hear my words, if again you suffer me to a second time to submit to any propositions unworthy of my character; either shall I cease to live, or shall no more behold you for ever.

"I know not," replied Leonce, then deeply dejected, "I know not what is your design; I know not with what resolution the remembrance of this day will inspire you; but if you leave me, I swear, and there is no necessity for my calling heaven to witness the sincerity of my words, I swear not to survive you; if you remain, perhaps it may be possible for me to render you happy. You shall suffer with me, or I alone shall die. Reflect on the alternative—adieu."—And without adding another word, he darted to the park gate. I did not venture to obstruct his departure.

ture. I only advanced a few steps to prolong the pleasure of beholding him. He departed—for a considerable time I heard the sound of his horse's feet. At length the sounds were no longer heard. All around me was silent, and I was left in all the gloom of solitude.

I experienced reflections of the bitterest and most afflicting nature. I conjure you, my sister, do not add to their poignancy. If destiny, if Leonce, condemn me to a sacrifice the most disastrous, do not, I beseech you, hasten the fatal moment, do not precipitately cut short the thread of life. Let me be at least allowed a short interval to prepare for the horrors of dissolving nature. I am compelled to disclose to you what I had the greatest anxiety to conceal. You know as well as I do all that imposes on me the obligation of separating from Leonce. I have not wished to repel that support which you can give to my courage; but if Leonce would save me the cruel effort, if he would consent to

renew

renew those months of tranquil enjoyment, which have passed over our heads. . . . . . Ah! do not tell me, that I ought no longer to indulge this solacing prospect, this remedy for all the sufferings I endure.

P. S. Mad. d'Ervins is expected in a few days. She also will, doubtless, unite her influence with yours: what will you both obtain from my distracted heart?

LETTER XLI.

M. DE VALERVE TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 15th, 1791.

I AM at Paris, Madame, and not having found you there, I propose going to your country seat. I know not if you are pleased at my arrival. I shall not be much

much disappointed in hearing, by a few lines from your sister-in-law, that you are not much elated at the idea of seeing me again. It seems to me, however, that I have some claims to your good will; perhaps it is your modesty which prevents you from acknowledging these claims. But I do justice to others and myself; it is impossible, however, not to feel a certain degree of happiness, when the calls of gratitude are not forgotten.

You know with what sincerity, with what ardor I have been attached to you ever since I became acquainted with you. I do not expect that all these things should be trumpeted forth at Paris, and I shall appear to considerable disadvantage in the company of all that attractive society which surrounds you; but at thirty years of age, one has had time to learn that triumphs are of little importance: and I should console myself for the total want of them, had your kindness for me remained unchanged. I feel myself melancholy and

languid

languid. You alone can relieve me from this situation. You are the only person I know for whom life is worthy of being preserved: every thing else that I meet with is so insignificant and absurd! I have spent but one day in this place, and I have already spoken with ever so many unpolished, unthinking, frivolous people, whose attention is never seriously occupied, but in their own persons. But such is their nature, and it is I who am wrong in being put out of patience by them.

I have come in quest of you only, and on your account alone do I remain. Be not, however, alarmed, I shall not see you every day. I have a journey to make to see an aunt of mine; this visit will last a month, and several other affairs will occupy part of my time. You see that I am anxious to quiet your mind.

Yet, while I express myself in this manner, I am a prey to suffering, and you may well believe that I am. Those who doom themselves to wear the appearance of tranquillity,

quillity, are but the more deeply agitated in the recesses of the heart. Accept, Madam, my most respectful compliments.

A. DE VALERBE.

LETTER XLII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 18.

I HAVE never pleased for a single day of my life, without pain; my duty, it should seem, meets me under every possible form. Heaven admonishes me by the pains which I feel, that it is full time to renounce the dangerous hope of passing in retirement with Leonce, a life of happiness and pleasure. He is no longer satisfied with the pleasure of our conversations. In vain he endeavours to conceal the agitation to which he is a prey; every thing tends

to

to betray him. Now he loads me with the most unjust reproaches; then he plunges into a state of despair, from which I have no longer the power to relieve him. What weakness, still to remain, when his happiness no longer centers in me!

M. de Valorbe arrived yesterday at Bellerive, according to the notice which he had given in the letter that I received from him. I had not an opportunity of preparing Leonce for his arrival. It was near seven, and I dreaded what might be the feelings of my friend, on seeing a stranger with me at the very hour of the day when I was in the habit of admitting his visits only. I had not previously apprised him of the gratitude I owed M. de Valorbe, so as to be under the necessity of neither concealing from him nor informing him of his sentiments towards me. M. de Valorbe's visit, therefore, gave me considerable uneasiness: I hoped, however, that Leonce would not be so unjust as to be displeased at it. M. de Valorbe, at first

first, felt a good deal of embarrassment on seeing me; but he endeavoured to conceal it. You know that he is a man who is always struggling against his own disposition. He wishes to pass for one who has an absolute command of himself, though one of the most impetuous characters in existence. He never utters two sentences in succession without expressing, in some measure, his contempt for the opinion of others, while, at the bottom of his heart, he is extremely hurt at not having acquired that reputation in the world to which he thinks he is entitled. He is out of humor with men and life; and this disposition he would honor with the appellation of melancholy and philosophical indifference.

In hearing him repeat to me that there was nothing worthy of exciting a lively interest, myself always excepted; and that, among all the men he had ever known, he had not met with two deserving of his esteem; I reflected upon the prodigious

difference between his character and that of Leonce.—Both of them susceptible; but the one from self-love, the other from elevation of soul—both feelingly alive to the opinion formed of them by the world; but the one from a desire of praise, the other from the fear of blame; the one to gratify his vanity, the other to preserve his honor from the slightest taint—both vehement; Leonce in his affections, M. de Valorbe in his enmities; and the latter, though good-hearted in the main, capable of every excess, the moment his pride, the habitual torment of his life, is roused into irritation. Being alone with me, he gradually recovered from that painful timidity which is the real cause of his peevishness, and was talking to me with a mixture of point and malignity, of the different persons with whom he was acquainted, at the moment Leonce entered. Leonce's whole attention was fixed on M. de Valorbe, whose figure is somewhat striking, though his hair combed over his forehead, and a too florid counte-

 nance

nance gave it rather a harsh expression; and the more his appearance is examined, the more difficult it is to discover that elegance which it is, at first view, thought to possess.

To meet a young man at my house, in intimate conversation with me, was more than was necessary to offend Leonce. His feelings were instantaneously depicted on his physiognomy, in a manner which made me shudder. M. de Valorbe continued the conversation for a few moments longer; but, when he perceived that Leonce affected to pay no attention to him, he stopped and regarded him with a fixed look. Leonce returned this look, but with what an air! he stood, leaning with his arm upon the chimney-piece, and, as he looked down upon M. de Valorbe, who was sitting beside me, he resembled the Apollo Belvidere, discharging his arrow at the serpent. M. de Valorbe retorted by a malignant smile to that expression which he could not equal, and would certainly

tainly have proceeded to an explanation, had I not instantly said to him, that my cousin M. de Mondeville had come to consult me upon an affair of importance. M. de Valorbe reflected for a moment, and doubtless recollecting that Matilda de Vernon, my cousin, had been married to M. de Mondeville, his features were completely tranquillized.

He took leave of me; and saluted Leonce, who continued to lean, as before, against the chimney, without indicating even by his eyes, or any motion of his head, that he took the least notice of the salutation. M. de Valorbe, surprised at this conduct, was proceeding to repeat his bow, in order to extort some mark of civility, or an explanation. But I prevented this intention by taking him by the hand, in order to shew him into an adjoining apartment, as if I had a few words to say to him. This amicable familiarity on my part was so new to M. de Valorbe, that it made him

forget every thing that happened. He followed me with considerable emotion; and I succeeded in preventing any observations on his part, by telling him, that my cousin's attention was totally absorbed by a subject of very serious anxiety, respecting which he had come to consult me. I consented to see M. de Valorbe the next morning, previous to the month's absence which he intended; and I twice permitted him to take my hand, though within sight of Leonce. I was so anxious to send away M. de Valorbe, that I paid no attention to the impression which my conduct might make upon M. de Mondeville. At last M. de Valorbe took his leave, and I returned to the apartment where I had left Leonce. No, Louisa, it is impossible for you to form any idea of the haughtiness and disdain of his first expressions. I supported them, for the purpose of more speedily justifying myself, by stating to him, with the most scrupulous veracity, all my connections with

with M. de Valorbe; and I concluded with particularly insisting on the gratitude I owed him for having saved the life of my benefactor, M. d'Albemar.

—"He may," replied Leonce, "have saved the life of M. d'Albemar; but I owe him no obligation; and it will be seen whether I cannot make him renounce the claim which he imagines he has on you, and which you countenance." I was hurt by this answer, and the recollection of what had happened since Leonce's return adding to this impression, I warmly said to him: "You flatter yourself with preserving an absolute power over my life, though all my days are spent in repelling the most unworthy complaints."

"It is true," replied he warmly, "I made you the spectator of my sufferings, pardon me for having dared to do so; but do you believe, that this offence gives you a right to betray me? Do you believe yourself free, because I am unhappy?—You mistake yourself much, if you suppose

pose your new lover will become your husband, before he is taught what blood ought to be shed to obtain you!"—These words roused my indignation, and prompted that reply which was best calculated to appease Leonce. "I would advise you," said I, "to give yourself up to those suspicions, which have already separated us, when we might have been united: they are more just this second time, then they were the first, for I deserved to lose your esteem on that day, when, yielding to your prayers, I gave up my plan of retirement, and returned to this spot, to devote myself to the criminal and unfortunate love, I feel for you." This reply made Leonce lose all recollection of M. de Valorbe. He ceased to be irritated, but I have no longer any hope of further happiness.

He no longer concealed from me what I had but too well conjectured. He confessed that he could not support life, while our situation remained the same; that

that he was jealous, because he felt that he had no right over me. He repeated this odious reproach in a tone of despair. "I know," said he "I may be a thousand times more wretched than I am at present; there are so many degrees in grief, that its last term is unknown; so long as you do not abandon me, I shall live, but it will be a life of torture and madness." I was about to interrupt him, for the purpose of soothing his mind, by recalling it to milder sentiments, when a servant informed me, that a messenger had arrived from Mad. d'Ervins, and preceded her only a few minutes.

Leonce desired to leave me, "I am not in a state," said he, "to see Mad. d'Ervins. She is to be pitied, I know, but still I require preparation, before I can appear in her presence. It was she—I do not accuse her, but it was she———." Without finishing the sentence, he pressed my hand, and departed precipitately. Mad.

 d'Ervins

d'Ervins arrived a few minutes after he was gone.

Alas! what a change! she still retains almost all her charms, but her countenance is pale, and there is an expression of sadness in her countenance, which renders it impossible to look on her without a sensation of sorrow. She was so fatigued, that I could not converse with her this evening. While she reposes, my dear Louisa, I write to you. I shall also communicate my situation to Theresa. I place some hope in her councils and example.—Assist me my dear sister with your advice.

LETTER XLIII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE. D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 21.

OH! what emotions has Theresa made me experience! I know what is required of me, I know not what may be obtained. My heart sinks at the thought of the effort, she would have me make; a letter which has arrived from you, supports her exhortations. Ah! do not unite, to overwhelm me with grief. You know not what you ask of me! must I renounce Leonce? Would you have me make that sacrifice? Ah! do not pronounce it. I had a presentiment that you wished to prepare me for this horrible idea in your letter: I trembled to read it, and when I found that your delicacy had induced you to leave unfinished what you had commenced, I was comforted, as if you had relieved

relieved me from my duties, by not mentioning them. I am weak, I feel it, I am weak, and I am conscious of my weakness. I do not possess the virtues which prepare us for making great sacrifices. My soul given up in infancy to the natural emotions, which had at all times directed its will, is not armed with powers indifferent for the accomplishment of duties so afflicting. I have not learned the power of controling my feelings and desires. Alas! I never expected, that I should stand in need of its aid. Why do I not possess the religious elevation of Theresa! But when I supplicate heaven, when my reason, and my heart placed a Being of sovereign goodness, it seems to me as if he did not condemn what I approve. Nothing within me, gives me the least intimation, that to love is a crime; and the more I reflect, the more I employ myself in prayer, the more is my soul penetrated with love for Leonce.

I have

I have written to you, that M. de Serbellane had left Italy with the view of settling in Germany, and that despairing of being able to induce Theresa to alter the determination which she had formed, he had secluded himself from society, and was plunged in the deepest melancholy. Theresa never pronounced his name. A letter from London apprized me of these sad details, and I have not ventured to communicate them to her. How noble and feeling is that Theresa who sacrifices all to duty. I am to conduct her the day after to-morrow to the convent. Why have I not strength of mind to follow her in her retreat? It is then necessary that we must separate. It is less cruel to descend into this religious grave of all worldly considerations, than still to live without seeing the object of our love.

The day after the arrival of Theresa, I passed the morning with her. I discovered from her conversation, that she believed herself guilty of injuries to me, and that

that she felt the bitterest regrets. She was afraid, however, to speak on this topic, and dreaded the moment of explanation. Leonce saw her in the evening. The moment that Mad. d'Ervins entered my chamber, he endeavoured to stifle the emotion which he experienced; but it did not escape the observation of Theresa. Addressing herself to Leonce, I then learned, that she knew all that I believed had been concealed from her.

"Sir," said she, with a tone of dignity which I had never before remarked in her timid and almost submissive character, "I know that by the most disastrous assemblage of circumstances, I have been the cause of the fatal error which has separated you from Mad. d'Albemar. I have sacrificed to God all my happiness in this world; he has not yet bestowed on me sufficient force to console me for the sufferings I have occasioned my generous friend. If I had not believed in consequence of my consent that you were informed

of

of my crime at the time of M. d'Ervins death, I would have hastened to accuse myself before you, but I did not discover till after your marriage, the fatal mistake which the delicacy of Mad. d'Albemar had induced me to conceal. I would from the moment I suspected this during my stay here, and when I was informed of the real state of the case at Bourdeaux, from certain questions you put to my daughter—I would have disclosed the whole truth; but you were married, and I could not restore that happiness to my friend which I had destroyed. I had, besides, strong reasons for suspecting that my husband's family would take away my daughter, and would, if I had avowed myself criminal, expose me to the scandal of a public trial. I have despaired, therefore, of your pardoning me for delaying that justification which I owed to Mad. d'Albemar, from the day in which I made her sign, in a manner which all the friends of M. d'Ervins cannot destroy, those engage-

ments

ments which secure to Isore her fortune, and authorize me to put her under Mad. d'Albemar's protection. I have relinquished all my personal claims on the property of my unhappy husband; and the day after to-morrow I shut myself up in a convent: I am, therefore, now free to repair, in the eye of the world, the injury I have done to the reputation of Mad. d'Albemar. But, alas! I feel but too strongly that I have not the less ruined her happiness for ever. Her heart, inexhaustible in every noble and tender feeling, has not ceased to love me." "Will you, Sir," added she, stretching out her trembling hand to Leonce, with angelic sweetness, "will you be more inflexible than a God of goodness, who notwithstanding my crime has received my repentance? Will you pardon me?"

Oh! my sister, why have you not the power of beholding Leonce at this moment!—No; you never more would have asked me to part from him: that sad, melancholy and stifled expression, which

for

for some time past, he has almost always exhibited, disappeared, and his countenance was lighted up, if I may use the expression, with a sentiment the gentlest and the most pure. He bent down on one of his knees to receive the hand of Mad. d'Ervins, and in a tone of voice, discovering the strongest emotion, he said to her, can you doubt receiving the pardon which you deign to request? It is not you, it is I alone who am culpable and still I live; still she suffers my complaints and bears with my faults; nay, sometimes even my reproaches. Have I then the right to reproach you? No, doubtless, and still less have I the power. Your destiny, your courage, your virtue, yes, your virtue, (hear these praises without endeavouring to reject them) penetrate my heart with respect and pity, and if I were worthy of joining in your affecting prayers, I would supplicate heaven in your behalf, for that repose which my heart no longer enjoys, but which at the expense of so

many sacrifices you have at length the prospect of enjoying.

Ah! said Theresa, raising Leonce up, I thank you for having banished from my breast the dread of your hatred. But this is not sufficient, you must listen to me on a subject intimately connected with your mutual happiness. But before I speak to you, I wish to see Mad. d'Artenas, she is a relation of M. d'Ervins; she is besides the friend of Mad. d'Albemar. It is my duty to inform her of the resolution which I have formed. Will you have the goodness, M. de Mondeville, to conduct me to her house to-morrow. The day after to-morrow I enter the convent, and a week after which will be the first of June; I shall begin my noviciate. Just Heaven? exclaimed I—it is a secret, replied Theresa, you know that by the new laws, vows are no longer recognized, but the venerable prior who conducts me, has arranged every thing, and if the nuns are no longer to be permitted to live in France,

France, as a community, he assures me of an asylum in a convent in Spain. I will ask of you, my dear Delphine, to conduct me to my retreat, with my daughter. I will embrace her on the threshold of the convent for the last time; it is you who will henceforth be her mother. While speaking of her daughter, her voice altered, but making a new effort, she said to Leonce, to-morrow, at mid-day, you will come M. de Mondeville to accompany me to Mad. d'Artenas's house. Leonce signified his assent by a nod of his head. He was too much overcome by his feelings to be able to speak. His soul is no less tender than it is elevated. It is not love alone that renders him feeling; nature has given him every virtue. Theresa regarded him with tenderness, and it is of him, I am sure, that she would have implored protection, if there had remained for her any interests in this world.

Next day, Leonce and Mad. d'Ervins returned together from Mad. d'Artenas's about

about four o'clock. I saw, without knowing the cause, that Leonce had been extremely affected. Theresa, apparently calm, asked leave to retire for a few hours to her chamber. Leonce remained alone with me, and informed me of all that had passed. He had no idea of the purpose of Mad. d'Ervins in taking him to Mad. d'Artenas's house, and on the way she did not utter a single word which could give him the least idea of it. They arrived together at Mad. d'Artenas's house, and they found her with her neice Mad. de R. After Mad. d'Ervins had announced to Mad. d'Artenas the resolution which she had taken, she described to her the conduct I had observed to her, and attributed to it a degree of merit far beyond what it deserved. She then disclosed all except what related to my attachment to Leonce. He told me, that through his whole life he had never entertained such high respect for any woman as for Mad. d'Ervins, at the moment she believed that she was performing

a hu-

a humiliating duty. Leonce remarked, that Theresa coloured several times while she was speaking, but without ever hesitating a moment—and I discovered united in her, added he, the greatest conflict of timidity and modesty, combined with the firmest resolution. She finished by declaring to Mad. d'Artenas, that far from wishing what she had said to be kept a secret, she was anxious that it should be made public every time that her connections in life gave her an opportunity of repelling that calumny which might be directed against me.

She reflected a moment, after finishing these painful confessions, as if for the purpose of discovering whether some other duties were not still to be performed. No one attempted to break silence. What had passed had too sensibly affected all who were present, to permit them to make any answer to her; and as if she was afraid that the conversation would revert to this subject, she rose for the purpose of preventing

venting this, and with a gentle inclination of her head to Mad. d'Artenas and her neice, she withdrew, without giving them time to express the interest and pity which her confession had inspired. You may conceive, my dear Louisa, that I was powerfully affected with this scene. Admirable Theresa! more admirable than if she had never been guilty of a crime. What virtues have sprung from her remorse? How much more respectable is her conduct than mine, who suffer myself, without support, to approach the farthest limits of morality, still endeavouring to persuade myself that I have not passed them.

This day, so full of interest, and which had excited such powerful emotions, was not yet ended: Theresa had not fulfilled all that religion commanded her to perform. She rejoined Leonce and me, and as I was approaching her to express my grateful sense of her conduct: "attend," said she, "to me, for I am much afraid that I shall be forced to give you pain,

but

but to-morrow I quit the world, and to-day it is my duty to perform all that is expected from those who would take leave of life for ever. Listen to me," she then sat down, and addressed herself to Leonce and me, in the following terms: "I have destroyed your happiness; had it not been for me, you would have been united, and virtue, as well as love, would have contributed to your enjoyments. This fatal disappointment, this disappointment, for which I never can make atonement, was occasioned by my crime. A disaster still more dreadful, the death of my husband, was the immediate consequence of my criminal love. It is not I, then, it is not I who ought to assume the right of offering severe counsels to souls so pure as yours. Still, however, God sometimes employs the wicked to give the most salutary lessons to the most virtuous. You are attached to each other by the most endearing of all sentiments—by love! one of you is bound by the most sacred ties, and

yet you see each other daily; you pass your lives together, trusting to that morality, which, at present, supports you. Doubtless, I do not possess an understanding so enlightened as yours. I cannot lay claim to your virtues, but, nevertheless, I formed the same resolution as you, but the presence of him whom I adored, gradually weakened every virtuous sentiment which afforded me support. Can I, after my fall, involve you in the same fate! Shall I have to render an account of your soul to the supreme judge of all? Alas! I alone would deserve punishment, but you would no longer be that incomparable being whom I hope one day to meet again in Heaven, if my repentance shall fit me for a place in those blessed abodes which are prepared for the just. And will you Leonce," continued she, "will you be happy if you destroy my friend? if you lead astray that noble and virtuous spirit, which God will more peculiarly call to himself, when misfortune, or what amounts

to the same thing, a long life will make her, feel the necessity of the aid of a positive religion; when she will guide my daughter in her conduct through life, when she herself ceases to command universal admiration," your daughter, exclaimed I, why will you abandon her? why will you commit her to my care? I am unworthy of so important a trust.

"Delphine! generous Delphine!" interrupted Theresa, "have I made myself so ill understood, as that you even for a moment imagine that in nature, there exists a being, for whom I entertain greater respect, than for you! though you subject yourself to the empire of love, I know that your heart continues pure, and that even in the commission of faults, it would only feel more cruelly; but more certainly the necessity of morality. The sorrows of my friend, would only be to me, an additional security, for the pains she would bestow on the virtuous education of my daughter. But you Delphine—what would become of you, if once only,

you yielded to the power of love, and by what vain hope do you flatter yourself, that you can avoid it? If he tells you of the affliction which your resistance creates, if he discover all the extent of his sorrows; if he conceal from you his sufferings, and they are discovered to you only by his altered looks, what will you do to afford him consolation? Listen to my words—I am about to bury myself in retirement for ever; the hand of God is already upon me. I have found in my soul strength sufficient to break asunder every tie, to renounce every enjoyment. I could not have felt power sufficient to behold the sufferings of him whom I love; and do you think yourself possessed of such strength? Delphine, infatuated that you are, you must either separate yourself from him for ever, or submissively yield to his desires. You cannot find but in the exaltation of a great sacrifice, force sufficient to resist the power of love. Delphine, in the name of heaven"—"Stop!" exclaimed

ed Leonce, in the most plaintive tone, "it is not to Delphine that you ought to address yourself. She is free and I am bound in indissoluble chains. She wished to unite her destiny to mine, and I despised the rich offering she presented to me. If any heart is to be torn with anguish, let that heart be mine. I have strength sufficient to depart—I am confident I have strength. The flames of war will ere long be kindled in France. I will go and join myself with that party whose opinions are congenial to my own. Among that party, destitute of power, death will be found without difficulty. If in your religion you have resources sufficient to enable Delphine to support the death of Leonce; if you have such resources, I embrace it, and I pardon you for indulging its consolations. But can you imagine that after having passed with her days full of agitation, but at the same time of delight; after spending with her days, during which I have con-

fided to her my most secret sorrows and my inmost feelings, that I could survive the sudden deprivation of my mistress and my friend. Of her who should have been my wife, and whom I should see no more; of her who directs my actions, gives an impulse to my thoughts, and who is ever present before me. Believe me, without having recourse to a resolution dictated by despair, my blood ceasing to flow, would no longer animate my life: and is it you Madame, is it you, that can forget what you yourself have inspired? have you forgotten all that he, perhaps, even now suffers, who is far separated from you?" "It is too much!" exclaimed Theresa, turning pale, and discovering a convulsive trembling which alarmed me exceedingly. "It is too much! What language is this that you make me hear? Do you think that my passions are so completely overcome that I am prepared for death? Do you know what the sacrifice I am about to make has cost me? Can you thus awaken all my bitterest recol-

recollections! Cease, cease! Delphine, support me; bear me hençe."

Leonce, inconsolable at the situation into which he had thrown Mad. d'Ervins, did not dare to approach her. She was carried into my chamber. I followed her and I sent word to Leonce, that I should not return to the apartment where I had left him. I did not wish to quit Mad. d'Ervins, and I felt myself in a state of such agitation, that I could not speak to Leonce. How could I have made him the witness of those cruel uncertainties, of that bitter remorse to which the words of Mad. d'-Ervins had given birth. I am anxious to come to a final resolution, but I cannot see him again till that resolution is formed. What it will be is known only to heaven. Mad. d'Ervins continued near an hour, without uttering a word, occasionally listening to me, and answering me only by her tears. I thought this was the favorable moment for attempting to divert her from her resolution of entering into a convent.

The first words I spoke on that subject instantly rendered her calm, and she gently expressed a wish to depart. I have since been informed that she spent two hours in prayer, and that afterwards she retired to rest and slept with the greatest composure till morning.

For myself I passed the night without ever for a moment closing my eyes. Unfortunate that I am! An enlightened understanding, when the heart is subjected to the empire of passion, is only a source of misery. I cannot, like Theresa, blindly adopt all the articles of faith which fill her imagination, and of which my heart stand so much in need. I invoke some unknown fervor, some principle of fanaticism, some phrenzy, some undefined sentiment to come to my support and assist me in struggling againſt love. Sometimes I am ready to conjure you to come hither. I wish to place my destiny at your disposal. You would speak to Leonce, you would see him and judge of his character. Alas! my sister,

that

that request would be too importunate. Could you make that sacrifice to her whom you have brought up, and who would now ask you again to resume the most absolute empire over her?

LETTER XLIV.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 26, 1791.

NO! Do not come: all is promised, all is, I think, decided. Theresa has perhaps carried to excess the influences which the softness of my temper gave her over me; but, in short, I have yielded to her tears, to the ardor of her entreaties. Her imagination was struck with the idea that she should have to accuse herself of the loss of my soul; and her confessor had, I believe,

believe, the preceding evening, impressed her anew with this terror. Her grief and her eloquence completely overpowered me. I did not, however, consent to remove to a distance from Leonce, until my mind was set at ease as to the probable consequences of his despair. I cannot, I ought not, to abandon him without this assurance. My real criminality would be to endanger his life; and what terror can supersede an alarm of this nature? I can more easily endure remorse itself.

Theresa wishes that Leonce should be a witness with me of the ceremony which is to consecrate the moment when she shall assume the veil of a novice. She confides in the impression to be made by that solemnity, and notwithstanding the resistance he has given to all her former entreaties, she conceives that at the foot of the altar, her last adieu may obtain Leonce's consent to my departure. She wishes to re-state to him, in that situation, what carries the force of conviction to her mind, that her

own

own salvation essentially depends upon mine, and that he cannot, without barbarity, resist the last effort which she is disposed to make, in order to rescue me from the calamities which await me. She thinks herself sure of thus obtaining the consent of Leonce. I have given her my promise, that if she actually do obtain it, I will set off that very instant. The ceremony is to take place in six days, and till then I have sworn that I will entirely conceal my feelings from Leonce. While Theresa extorted my assent to every engagement she thought fit to propose, I entertained, I must confess to you, a secret hope, that nothing would induce Leonce to acquiesce in my departure. But my opinion is now changed. Theresa is so impressive; the moment which she has fixed on is so well adapted to affect his feelings! I shall add my own entreaties to hers: it is my duty to do so, and I will perform it. But to remain silent during these six days; to see him again with the idea that we shall

soon, perhaps, be separated for ever! Theresa has exacted too much from me; her devotion at once fervid and romantic, instead of supporting me, overpowers, and carries me along with it.

In a thousand different ways has she repeated to me, with that impassioned accent, which she derives from love, but consecrates to religion, that I could not attempt to deny her the hope which she still entertained of saving me, and thus of obtaining the forgiveness of her own transgressions. "What I request of you," said she, "is very trifling; I only ask permission to try whether, at a moment of peculiar solemnity, I cannot melt your lover to a tender sense of the fate to which he consigns you. This request you cannot oppose without a conscious avowal that, were he, even to accede to your departure, you would not be capable of carrying it into execution!" Actuated by a secret dread, I still persisted in refusing her request; but as I was on the point of leaving

her

her, she threw herself at my feet, together with her daughter, and so forcibly represented what I should feel if I plunged myself into guilt, what she herself had suffered, because at a distance from me, she had no friend of rigorous intellect to apply to for assistance, that she excited in my heart so powerful an emotion, that I consented to every thing she could demand.

What will be the result? An agonizing separation. I am like a person distracted, and disposed of without consulting my inclinations. I know not what I have to fear. Such efforts will, perhaps, but increase the dangers from which it is intended to save me. Ah! Leonce, it is you who will be the arbiter of my fate; it is you who will burst asunder our reciprocal ties?

LETTER XLV.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, May 28th, 1791.

WHENCE proceeds the anxiety which I feel? Never did you appear more affecting, more tender than yesterday! I was intoxicated with delight while in your company; but when I endeavoured to trace back the occurrences of the evening, I felt only an uneasiness, and melancholy which it is impossible to describe. I found you sitting for your likeness, intended as a present to me. You were habited in a Greek costume, which rendered you still more celestial. All your charms were displayed to my view. I looked at you for some time, but felt myself a prey to a passion which consumed my life. The painter

left the room ; I clasped you in my arms; and twice you reclined your head upon my shoulders ; but I did not impart to you the ardor which animated my own feelings. Your eyes were bathed in tears, your visage pale, and your looks dejected. In this situation had it been possible for your heart to have yielded to my love, an indescribable, but all powerful sentiment would, in my opinion, have prevented me from accepting even the consummation of my happiness.

I retired from you, and approached you, by turns; you continued silent; yet you loved me, and my bosom was agitated by a fever of affection, and a thrilling sensation of regret, which was altogether inexplicable. I requested you would take your harp. You know what effect it has in soothing my griefs, to hear your voice accompanied with that instrument.—Ah! replied you, in an animated tone, I cannot endure music; do not

not ask me to play.——Why could you no longer endure music? You have often repeated to me those words of Shakespeare—

> The man that hath no music in himself,
> And is not moved by concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

Why then has music lost its influence over your heart?

I have your promise that you will never depart without my knowledge. I cannot doubt it; you have repeated it anew. What then is the cause of the condition in which I beheld you? Ah! could you have felt some attack of that grief which weighs me down to the grave? Could you have felt that we must die, if we are not united together? No! your eyes expressed neither the transport, nor the uncontrolled indulgence of passion. Delphine, your soul is so pure, so open, that nothing can ruffle it unperceived by

your friend. Tell me, therefore, what was the sentiment which yesterday occupied your mind?

LETTER XLVI.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, May 31.

A FRIEND of yours, has written to you, that he thought me altered, and this circumstance has given you uneasiness. Set your mind at ease, I entreat you. I am indisposed, but my life is not in the slightest danger. I have frequently an attack of fever in the evening; but it proceeds from mental affliction. For sometime past I have been alarmed, lest Mad. d'Albemar should desert me; and the

the anxiety occasioned by this apprehension, excites a continual agitation in my system, but be assured, that it is not this bodily disorder which will terminate my existence. Do not come to see me: you could be of no assistance to me. Never did one feel what I feel! I will remain no longer in this condition. It must be brought to a conclusion; cost what it may, it must. Await my fate in patience; I do not wish your tranquil life to approximate mine; you would be brought within the sphere of a fatal influence.

LETTER

LETTER XLVII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

Bellerive, June 1,
ten in the morning.

MAD. D'ERVINS writes to me again this morning, that she is extremely desirous that you should be a witness to the ceremony of this evening. Call on me at four o'clock to conduct me to the convent. Such is her request, and we cannot refuse it.

LETTER

LETTER XLVIII.

ANSWER OF LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, June 1, at Noon.

IF you insist upon it, I will go; but endeavour to get me excused. I dread affecting scenes; you know not what mischief they do me, in my present disposition of mind! I will be with you by four; but, if possible, write to Mad. d'Ervins that you will go alone.

LETTER XLIX.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, June 2.

IF I am not yet altogether unworthy of your favor, my Louisa, I know not to what aid of heaven I am indebted for it. Did I merit this, and after so culpable a period of my life? Doubtless not: but it has been extended to me, that I may give myself up to sorrow—that I may expiate, by my grief, that day on which my feelings prophaned every thing that is most respectable on earth. I am extremely ill; my life is even supposed to be in danger. I am ordered not to write; but, if I must die, I am anxious that you should know something of the last hours which I have passed. They have been terrible! let the recollection of them remain deposited in your breast!

breast! Learn what are the struggles which, perhaps, have immediately preceded the close of my life! I am apprehensive that my fever will throw me into a state of dilirium; I have, perhaps, but a few moments left in which to collect my thoughts; these I still devote to you. Love me! if I die I may hope for forgiveness.

Leonce, though with reluctance, at last resolved to accompany me, in compliance with the request of Mad. d'Ervins. We reached the gate of the convent to which I had conducted her the preceding evening, and near which resided her confessor. I there found a man waiting for me, who gave me a letter from her, apprizing me that she was to be admitted a novice—and in what place, just heavens!—in the very church where I had witnessed the marriage of Leonce! This circumstance Theresa had concealed from me; but it was upon this choice that she relied for effecting a triumph over our love. I doubted, I must confess, whether I should go forward; but

but the conclusion of Theresa's letter was so urgent—she told me in such forcible language that she required to see me once more, and that I should pierce her to the heart, if I deprived her, at such a crisis, of the presence of her only friend—that I had not the courage to refuse her. Leonce, on this occasion, perceiving how much I was agitated, insisted that I should not be left alone to undergo this painful trial. I was already so much disconcerted, that I was no longer mistress of my will, and I permitted myself to be conducted, without reflection or resistance.

During the part of the way which we still had to go, both of us preserved the most profound silence. The instant, however, that my carriage turned into the road leading to the church of St. Marie, Leonce recollecting the spot, which, indeed, he could not well forget, said, with a deep sigh: "In this manner did I accompany Matilda: there she was," exclaimed he, pointing to where I sat:

"Oh!

"Oh! why did I come! I cannot . . . ." He seemed to wish to get away; but, as he looked at me, my paleness and terror must have certainly struck him; for, instantly interrupting himself, he added: "No! poor, unhappy Delphine, you are suffering; I will not leave you to suffer alone; lean upon your friend." We alighted from the carriage; the church was shut against every one except us: an aged priest came to meet us, and, having but an imperfect recollection of the two visitors who were ordered to be admitted —"Madam," said he to me, pointing towards Leonce, "this gentleman is undoubtedly your husband!" Ah! Louisa, this simple observation awakened so many topics of regret and remorse, that I stood motionless before the gate of the church, not daring to pass over the threshold. Leonce precipitately replied—"I am related to the lady;" and drew me in along with him.

The

The priest made us sit in a bench at a little distance from the grating of the choir. Leonce seated himself so as to avoid seeing the altar at which he had been married. His breathing was loud and short. As for me, I had covered my eyes with my handkerchief; I saw nothing, I scarcely thought of any thing; I was merely sensible of an inward agitation, a terror without any fixed object, which entirely discomposed my reflections. One of the doors communicating with the interior of the convent, was thrown open. A number of nuns covered with black veils, and followed by the unfortunate Theresa, dressed in a white robe, advanced at a little distance from us in profound silence. Theresa supported herself on the arm of her confessor; but her pace however, was not unsteady. On the contrary, I could remark that an extraordinary fervor of mind, had rendered it rather rapid. As she walked up the church, the priests chaunted a mournful psalm, which

which was accompanied by an organ of considerable softness of tone. Theresa left the nuns to speak with me. She clasped my hand with an expression, which I shall never forget, and reaching a letter to Leonce, said to him in a low voice:—"When the eternal barrier shall have closed upon me, read this letter, in this very church, by the light of that lamp which burns at a few steps from the altar, where you pronounced your irrevocable oath. Listen, in order to prepare yourself for what I venture to request of you, to the hymns of the nuns, who are about to consecrate my entrance into their asylum. As soon as they have ceased, I exist no longer for this world. But, if you grant my prayers, you will effect my reconciliation with God. I shall no longer be chargeable in his sight, with the perdition of both of you; and you, my friend," said she to me, "you see to what love has brought me.—Shun my example—adieu!" In uttering these words, she approached the

the grating of the choir, turned round once more towards me, and as that grating was about to separate us for ever, she gave me a parting sign, as if already on the confines of earth and heaven. I figured to myself that I saw her pass from life to death, and she appeared in the distance like a light shade invested with immortality.

Leonce sat immoveable with Theresa's letter in his hand. "What can it contain?" said he to me, in the most plaintive tone—"What would you have me do? Are you in concert with her?"—"I conjure you," interrupted I, "to obey the request of Theresa. Do not yet read the contents of her letter. Bestow on her a moment of commiseration; I shall join with you, my friend. Let us for a few moments longer indulge in a sorrow, unmingled with bitterness."—once, who stood behind me, rested his hand on the pillar, against which I also supported myself; my head reclined on his trembling hand; and this movement,

I conceive, created a momentary suspense of his agitation. The music continued, and the impression which it made, plunged me into an extraordinary reverie, of which I have retained but a very vague recollection. But I was soon roused by the stifled sighs of my unfortunate friend, and I gave unrestrained vent to my tears.

I invoked the Deity to terminate my existence in this situation, in which I experienced the most delightful sensations. I no longer imposed any restraint on my soul, which yielded to unbounded emotions. I seemed about to expire in tears, and felt as if my life was about to be extinguished by an immoderate excess of tenderness and sorrow. I know not how long this extacy continued, but I was only recovered from it by the noise made by the curtains of the choir when they were drawn close. The ceremony being terminated, the nuns and the priests retired: all now was silence; not a soul was seen, and

and Leonce and I remained alone in the church.

Without letting go my hand, Leonce approached towards the light, and read the solemn, eloquent, and terrible prayer, which Theresa had addressed to him, to induce him to save my soul, by breaking off our connection, and seeing me no more. I could only hear some words, which he trembled as he repeated. He had scarce finished, when turning towards me his eyes, full of anguish and reproach, he said: "Have you too combined in producing these terrible emotions? Have you resolved to leave me?"—"Consent," said I, with an effort, "consent to my absence, I conjure you, Leonce; yield to the voice of heaven, which Theresa has pronounced! Do you not perceive that the vigour of my soul is exhausted? I must fly or become criminal! It is not in my power to struggle longer! Let us resolve this moment! . . . . . ."—"It is then true," replied Leonce, "it is true that you have formed the

the design of leaving me! Have the days we have passed together made no impression on your heart! Well! it is done! There is not another hour of repose for me on this earth! But when must this separation take place?"—"Instantly!" I exclaimed; "every thing is prepared; allow me to depart; let this sacred spot witness so noble an effort!"—"It shall witness," said he, "my death; I am overcome; I no longer possess hope sufficient to animate me to triumph over your design! I was deceived! you have not loved me! you can part! Well! well! the sacrifice is made! Adieu."

Never Louisa was the grief of Leonce so profound, and so affecting; it had changed its character; he no longer tried to detain me, but I saw in his countenance a dreadful expression of gloomy resignation, which chilled me with horror. I spoke to him, but he replied not. I could not endure the idea of his ceasing to believe in my passion for him; ten times he repulsed the

the assurances I made him, and seemed to resist every sentiment of kindness, as if determined to die, he was afraid of doing any thing to regret in life. At last a more tender accent suddenly arrested his attention, but produced a state of distraction, not less alarming than the despondency from which he recovered. "If you wish," said he, "that I should believe in your love, if you wish that I should live, there still exists one means! it alone can expiate the sufferings you have made me endure! it alone can prevent the torments that await me! We must bind ourselves to each other, even this moment by an oath, which you may call sacrilege, but without which no human power can make me consent to live.—" What wouldst thou of me?" said I, alarmed; "Art thou not the sovereign of my heart?"——

—"Who can rely," he replied, "in the bitterest accent of anguish; who can reply on thy uncertain resolution, on a heart always struggling, always ready to escape from

from me? There is only one tie on earth, there is but one that can secure thee! This moment then of despair, is the last in which passion always repressed, always conquered by each new repentance, can demand, can obtain the pledge of love. Let it be given even in the spot, the cruel recollections of which you constantly invoke against me. Let the silent horrors of this place witness your promise, or irrevocable refusal. Come with me;"—I found that he wished to draw me towards the fatal altar, near the pillar behind which I beheld his unfortunate marriage; we were still a few steps from it, and I leaned on one of the tombs, which pious affection has erected in this church.

—"Stop here," said I to Leonce, "let us remain near the dead." "No," he replied, with a voice which I still think I hear, "resist me not: follow me."—My strength was exhausted; he put his arm around me, and carried me forward with him. I found myself exactly in front of the altar,

where

where the sacrifice of my destiny was accomplished: I looked at Leonce to discover what passed in his mind. His hair hung loose, his beauty more remarkable than at any other period of his life, had assumed a supernatural character, which penetrated me at once with terror and love—"Give me your hand," he cried "give it to me. If it is true you love me, you must, unhappy Delphine, you must, as well as I, desire happiness. Swear then on this altar, yes, on this very altar, from which we ought to drive for ever the horrible phantom of a hateful marriage; swear to know no other ties, no other duties than those of love; take an oath to belong entirely to your lover or I shall dash my head against these steps, until my blood spring up against you. I have sustained too much sorrow; I have struggled too long. In this sanctuary then, in this house of tears, I declare to you that I am wearied of suffering: I wish to be happy, but the traces of my sorrow are too deep, nothing can calm

calm my fears. I shall always see you ready to escape from me, if the most endearing and sacred bonds do not assure me of our union. The burthen that presses on my soul is too heavy to be borne; I must either enjoy the pleasures of life, or death must snatch me from my pains. If you refuse me, Delphine, the place is well chosen: there are graves under our feet; point out the stone you design for me; make some lines be engraved upon it, and then fancy you have performed every duty towards me. Alas! what remains there of those men, who like me have been unfortunate? only some almost effaced inscriptions, to which chance sometimes directs our inattentive eyes! Delphine, death is under our footsteps; either bury thy love in these tombs, or throw thyself into his arms. He will carry thee far from the horror of these vaults, and we shall share together the enjoyments of heaven and of love."

His looks filled me with inexpressible terror; I said, "Leonce, let us leave this place,

place, I shall not part from you, but what would you with me?" "Let us go hence," he exclaimed, detaining me with violence, "in an hour you would resume your dreadful empire over me. I shall renounce this miserable life of fears, of tortures, and of sorrows. This day shall terminate an existence which is insupportable. Your soul must, at this moment, feel what sacrifice you are capable of making for me. If it resist the state in which you see me, and the agitation that state produces in yourself, then all is over; every relation between us is broken. Take the oath, I require, or leave me; but return to-morrow at the same hour, and you shall hear the priests sing for me the same hymns you have sung for your friend. Thou wilt then be alone in the world, Delphine! Alas! Delphine, when thus separated for ever, from all which was once dear to thee, wilt thou not regret the unfortunate man who so tenderly loved thee?" Louisa, my heart wavered: "what cruelty," I exclaimed, "Wouldst

"Wouldst thou in this place ask such a promise? Wouldst thou profane all that is sacred on earth?" "I would," replied Leonce, "bind myself to you for ever—I would at once free thy soul from all the vain scruples which yet tyrannize over it. Were we, Delphine, placed at the extremity of the world—had volcanoes swallowed up the earth which gave us birth, and all the beings we have known wouldst thou then think it a crime to unite thyself to thy lover? Ah! then let us forget the universe: it exists no more; nothing remains but our love. Daughter of heaven! thou never hast known the enjoyments of love; no mortal has possessed thy charms. When thy soul shall be entirely given up to me, thou wilt love me with an affection which thou cannot as yet comprehend. We shall then enjoy a new and a united life, of which our separate existence can afford no idea. Say then, dost thou not feel, as I do, a transport of the heart, pointing towards supreme felicity; a delirium of hope which

cannot

cannot be disappointed without making the future prospect of life fade for ever? Hear me then, Delphine; if thou leavest this place without abandoning thy resolution, before thy designs are irrevocably changed, I know that all is finished with me. The horror of my violence will pursue thee; thou wilt recollect only this sentiment. I have done, Delphine pronounce thy decision; death was never so near me! "Were all my blood," he cried, with vehemence, striking his breast, "flowing from this heart, I should have a thousand times more chance of life than at this moment!"

Just heaven! what could give an idea of the expression of Leonce, at this time? He seemed so agitated that I dreaded some dreadful event. I had almost lost all power over myself: I was about to promise in the sanctuary of virtue, to forget all my duties. By a last effort, however, I threw myself on my knees, and addressed a prayer to heaven, which, doubtless, was heard.

"Oh

"Oh God!" I exclaimed, "enlighten me with a sudden ray of wisdom! all the recollections, all the reflections of my life are no longer of use to me: unexpected emotions seem to have seized my soul, which no calculation of duty has foreseen: if so much love be an excuse in thy eyes—if when such sentiments exist, thou requirest not of human strength to resist them; suspend this horror which I still experience, for an oath I believe impious! Relieve me from the remorse of my soul, that forgetting all I have been accustomed to respect, I may place my glory, my virtue, my religion, in the happiness of him I love; but if this oath demanded with so much fury, be a crime: Oh, my God! do not condemn me to behold Leonce in torment: annihilate me this moment, in this holy temple filled with thy presence! opposite sentiments, of equal force, alternately take possession of my soul, and thou alone canst terminate this terrible incertitude. Oh, my God! give

me,

me, I beseech thee, the peace of the heart, or the peace of the grave! . . . . ."

I know not what I experienced at this moment, but the violence of my emotions surpassed my strength. I thought I was about to die, and impressed with the idea that there was something supernatural in this effect of my prayer, while I fainted, I still articulated these words: "hear me, O my God!"

Leonce has since told me that he was persuaded as well as myself, that heaven had granted my prayers; and on raising me in his arms, he doubted, for some time, whether I lived. He lifted me to his carriage, and I arrived at Bellerive before I recovered my senses. When I opened my eyes, I found Leonce by my bedside; for a long time I remembered nothing that had happened; but as the day began to appear, my recollection gradually returned, and I trembled at the retrospect. Remorse, shame, and the strongest terror seized me, on recollecting the place

in

in which such a criminal oath had been required of me. I looked at Leonce, desired him to leave me, and return to his own house to calm the inquietude which his absence must have caused to Matilda. I saw from his agitation that he dreaded the resolution I might form; I therefore promised to wait for his return this evening. Oh! I cannot desert him; I have no longer resolution in any thing.

Indeed, Louisa, I believe my prayer has really been heard: I seem to feel the approaches of death: I have, at least, been able to write to the end of this terrible relation; and you will know what has happened to me—what a struggle I have sustained—what sorrows! . . . . Ah! they will be the last. Adieu! Louisa, my hand trembles; I feel my reason disturbed: with my last strength, with my last accents, I would tell you I love you.

LETTER L.

MAD. DE LEBENSEI TO MADLLE. D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, June 4, 1791.

I AM extremely unhappy, Madame, to be obliged to communicate to you most painful intelligence. Mad. d'Albemar is at the point of death. She has been removed to Paris in a state of delirium, and every word she utters plainly shews that the sufferings of the heart have produced her disorder. There still is time; come to her. M. de Mondeville is in a state little different from that of Delphine—My husband alone preserves sufficient presence of mind to assist them. Mad. d'Albemar has already several times pronounced your name. Ah! why are you not here! but it still is to be hoped that you will arrive in time!

END OF VOL. III.

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